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THE CAVALRY WENT THROUGH

BERNARD NEWMAN

The CAVALRY WENT THROUGH

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FOREWORD

Did you never sit in your dugout and day-dream? Not of peace, but of the war? Of a Napoleon who would arise, sweeping aside the divided counsel of incongruous allies, to lead a devoted army to signal victory? And that that Napoleon might be you?

INTRODUCTION

This, I think, is one of the books which have to be published, as the publishers' circulars sometimes claim. It is certain that I never expected to write a book ; the reader will probably guess that before he has read very far. But nor, for that matter, did I ever expect to fight in a world war, and still less to attain the rank of Brigadier-General. But I have been persuaded that I can make some small contribution to history—which I believe is true. An autobiography may be interesting, but its viewpoint is limited. A formal biography of a great man, compiled from official sources, is often lifeless. This book is neither an autobiography nor a biography. It is but a series of personal reminiscences centred on the greatest military figure of the ages. I may not dive deeply, but—except where it is plainly indicated otherwise—every word I have written is based on my own experience and knowledge. I am happy and proud to think that I have been closely associated with Henry Berrington Duncan from the moment of his arrival in France. In those two epochal years during which he rose from Colonel to Field Marshal, I received as much of his confidence as

he gave to anyone. True, he often did things which I did not understand, and used argument beyond my comprehension, but that was not necessarily because my brain capacity was subnormal, but rather because his own was abnormal. In brief, I am but the Watson to his Sherlock Holmes ; yet such a record is not without value, and ought certainly to be of interest. To those who may complain of my casual treatment of things, I have many replies. One, I am not a professional writer. Two, the subject merits—and will receive at the hands of history—hundreds of volumes ; I intend to write but one. Three, many of my blanks can be readily filled in by the student from other sources. For example, my description of Duncan's campaigns, though accurate, is graphic rather than detailed. Remember that I was in the midst of things myself, so that a general view was difficult. But, after all, the official despatches[1] can supply all my failings in this respect. My purely personal line of vision, too, will explain why I pass over great events in a few paragraphs, and yet describe other things in detail : it is in these details, I believe, that my small contribution to history lies.

The reader may recall the many fantastic stories circulated about Duncan's origin, after he had made his sensational appearance on the Western

[1] *The Official Despatches of the British Commanders during the Great War*, 1914–17, edited by Colonel H. J. Beresford.

Front. The commonest and best accepted legend hinted that he was the offspring of a morganatic marriage in a royal household. This, of course, is the kind of rumour that normally sensible people swallow so readily in war-time. The story of Duncan's early life has, however, been told accurately in full by a friend of his and of mine,[1] so I need give but a synopsis. He was the youngest son of a Leicestershire farmer. Educated at a local grammar school of the best traditional type, he won an open scholarship to Cambridge. There his career was successful enough without being distinguished. He finished strongly, nevertheless, securing a high place in that stiffest of all competitive examinations, the First Division of the Civil Service. A strong desire to travel made him abandon the idea of a Home appointment, which was his right : he chose a position known, I believe, as a " Student Interpretership "—a kind of apprenticeship in Colonial Government. In this he was an immediate and a brilliant success. After a year in London, he was drafted to China. There he soon came into local prominence by his vigorous handling of the famine situation in the Kuang Sang region. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that in China he first experienced military leadership —for, when the Tobash pirates retired inland after our naval attack, it was Duncan who raised a scratch force, surrounded the miscreants, and all

[1] Arthur J. Faber, *The Childhood of Henry Duncan.*

but annihilated them in a pitched battle. By a happy accident, a well-known journalist happened to be on the spot at the time, and his subsequent book[1]—published, of course, several years before the World War—is intensely interesting as being the earliest comment on Duncan's military genius.

After considerable experience of Colonial administration in many parts of the world, Duncan found himself at the outbreak of war in charge of an enormous territory in British East Africa. He was easily the youngest governor in the Colonial service—for at this time he was only thirty-nine years old : this fact alone, under the conservative tradition of our Colonial policy, is a great tribute to his ability. The circumstances leading to his military command need only to be mentioned to be recalled : as a matter of fact, the Colonial wars generally received far too little attention from the British public—engrossed in the great life and death struggle in France and Belgium. But the campaign in German North-East Africa struck a note of romance—a sure awakener of interest in England. The reader will remember that the British force under Brigadier-General Southwark was betrayed by native guides, caught in an ambush, and completely defeated. Southwark and

[1] Leslie A. Burningham, *The Last of the Tobash Pirates*. See particularly pp. 174 and 175, where the author compares Duncan's first exploits to those of Clive—a very apt analogy.

all his principal officers were killed, fighting valiantly till the last. Greatly elated, the German forces promptly invaded British East Africa—then absolutely denuded of regular troops. Duncan set himself to raise a defence force ; all the able-bodied settlers rallied to his standard, native levies were raised, and detachments were landed from two naval vessels. With this motley army the battle of Isooandi was fought. Though not an overwhelming victory for us, the invasion was definitely checked, and the Germans returned precipitately to their own frontier. It was a month before Duncan started in pursuit—his organisation detail must have been enormous. But then came a series of marchings and counter-marchings, of skirmishes and battles, such as will serve for ever as a model of their kind. The masterly strategy that led to Dorran Clump—where the whole of the German force was totally defeated and compelled to surrender—attracted much attention at the time. The campaign culminated at a moment when all was " quiet " on the Western Front, and a victory of some kind was badly needed to soothe our overwrought nerves. But, strangely enough, one all-important fact was overlooked by everyone—civilians and military men alike : the fact that, although over 7,000 prisoners were taken in the campaign, the total British force was only a little over a thousand strong. This came to have a great significance later.

My story proper begins from the moment when, three months later—that is to say, in October 1915—Duncan's force was transferred to the Western Front. Its work in Africa had been well and truly done, and he had urged for its employment in France. This was before the days of conscription and man-power crises, and such recruits to our army were very welcome. My own brigade had been badly smashed at Loos, and it was arranged that Duncan's battalion should join us. I can pass on at once, therefore, to the story of my association with this remarkable man. I will try my utmost to be utterly fair and unbiased in my judgment, but the reader will know that any lapses are due to my great admiration—nay, my great love—for this man whose career changed the destiny of the world.

THE CAVALRY WENT THROUGH

CHAPTER I

"He's got whiskers," Meyer muttered tragically.

Meyer was such an utter fool that we always laughed at him automatically. But for once Stanley was serious.

"That fellow!" he groaned. "He's impossible!"

"Who—Meyer?" I asked.

"No—the other one!"

"You don't mean Duncan?"

Stanley and Meyer—Brigade Major and A.D.C. respectively—had just returned from the official welcome to the newly arrived North-East African Battalion.

"He's got whiskers," Meyer repeated in a whisper.

"But who's got whiskers?" I demanded.

"Fermery!" said Stanley, after a moment's pause.

"Fermery! Fermery!" I was racking my memory. "Fermery! Oh—he's the second in command, isn't he?"

Stanley nodded.

"Well, what about him?" I asked.

"He's got whiskers!" chattered Meyer.

"But you've not both gone balmy because a man in a Colonial force has got whiskers," I insisted. "What's in all this? Tell me from the beginning."

"No, it's the whole crowd of them—absolute outsiders—you never saw such a mob," said Stanley. "Listen! You remember that they were to disentrain at Nœux-les-Mines at noon to-day. They were to feed at railhead, and march along the Mazingarbe Road, where Debeney[1] was to inspect them at 3 p.m. in the flat alongside the cemetery. Well, I left Meyer at the station to look after them when they arrived and to bring them along, and I went to Divisional H.Q. for lunch. We got to the flat in good time. Three o'clock, and not a sign of anybody. There we all were—G.O.C., Staff, Commanders, and representatives of every battalion in the division—all waiting to welcome these Africans, and they didn't turn up!"

"What had happened?" I broke in.

"Of course, if Meyer hadn't been such an utter idiot," Stanley continued—Meyer merely stood and stared at him open-mouthed—"we should have found out something earlier. Instead of making enquiries, he just stood like a boob in the railhead yard waiting for them to appear. Anyway, I sent an orderly to railhead. Soon after 3 o'clock I went along myself. The R.T.O.[2] could

[1] Major-General H. J. Debeney, C.M.G., General Officer commanding the 21st Division.

[2] Railway Transport Officer.

tell me nothing. He had received no word whatsoever of their train, he said. So I was riding back to tell the G.O.C. that there must have been a breakdown somewhere along their journey. Outside the station, in the main street, I found something was happening. All the local inhabitants were lining the streets—and many of them were laughing."

"Yes," Meyer chimed in. He spoke as one who disbelieved his own words. "The civvies were laughing."

"What at?" I demanded.

"At the East Africa Field Force," Stanley went on. I could see he was really worried. "There they were, marching along. You never saw such a collection in your life. I take back everything I ever said about the New Army." (Stanley had come to us from the Guards.) "There were big men and little men, black men and white men, dressed in a weird assortment of uniforms. They marched along anyhow, in any sort of order. I galloped to the front of the column. There was a big man leading; he was tall, but round-shouldered—and had whiskers!"

"Whiskers!" This in a squeak from Meyer.

"He made no attempt to salute," Stanley went on bitterly (the red hat is a priceless treasure to him); "but he asked Meyer if he were General Wednesbury! Fancy! Look at him! He only had a crown up, but I chanced it, and said:

" Colonel Duncan, I suppose ? "

" ' No,' he said. ' Duncan was called on to London to report to the Cabinet, or something. I'm Fermery. I look after this bunch when Duncan isn't handy.' "

Stanley's brows were knitted even at the recollection of the scene. I would have given pounds to have witnessed it.

" I have never seen such a collection of toughs in my life," Stanley continued. " There, in the front rank, were three niggers, staring and grinning at me as if I were a freak. However, I asked Fermery what had happened—had the train broken down farther along the line ? "

" ' Well, no,' he said, ' it didn't exactly break down—although many a time I thought it would. But when we got to Hazebrouck last night we'd had enough of cattle-trucks after forty-eight hours, so we thought we'd get out and walk.' "

" What ! " I yelled.

" Yes, that's what he said—they thought they'd get out and walk."

" And you mean to say that, after a three weeks' journey, they'd marched through the night from Hazebrouck ! "

" I do—and they looked as if they had. I had to make up my mind what to do. My first impulse was to hide them somewhere, but then I thought the G.O.C. might as well know the worst. So I took them along. My God, what a review ! They

wheeled into the flat like a troop of Boy Scouts And the march past ! I thought the G.O.C. was going crazy. They marched past him and didn't notice him ! "

" What ! " I cried. I could hardly picture the scene.

" I galloped after them. I hardly knew what I was saying. But this man Fermery was most unconcerned.

" ' Is this where we kip down ? ' he asked. ' All right, I reckon the boys will make themselves at home. Who's that crowd over there ? ' "

" I hastily explained the position as coherently as I could."

" ' Oh, General Debeney ! He's quite a big bug, isn't he ? I suppose I'd better walk over and meet him.' "

" My God, how I kept sane I don't know, but I endeavoured to tell him that this was supposed to be a general inspection."

" ' Oh, is that it ? ' he said. ' All right. Boys, look sharp now—the General wants to see you. Fall in and follow me.'

" What a command—' Fall in and follow me ! ' And they did ! Straight past the G.O.C. they marched and—and——"

" And whiskers saluted ! " Meyer grinned—now about normal.

" Yes, he saluted—or, rather, he touched his cap like a flunkey. No eyes right—not a word. When

I asked him about that afterwards, he said that he'd only been given a drill-book when he landed at Marseilles, so he hadn't got as far as that bit yet. Think of it, man—a major in the British Army——"

"Never mind," I said, "Go on, tell me the rest. How did Debeney take it?"

"Remarkably well. The trouble was about his speech. You know what a rotten speaker he is. He had learned off all the stock phrases about 'smart and soldierly appearance' and so on, and, of course, the whole thing was a wash-out. However, the last part was about the battalion's record in North-East Africa, so he put that in. But Fermery's reply:

"'Thanks, General,' he said. 'That's nice of you. Now, we've just had a nice walk to stretch our legs: we always like to finish up with a few yards at the double. After that, six hours' sleep per man, and then, if you'll kindly indicate what part of France you'd like us to fight in, we're your men!'

"The G.O.C.'s face registered amazement, and Fermery must have misinterpreted it.

"'Of course, if you want us quicker, we can cut out the six hours' sleep,' he said.

"Debeney went home after that, and left me to straighten things out. I haven't done it. I never shall do it. They're a disgrace to the brigade, a disgrace to the division, a disgrace to the Army.

No, I don't want any dinner. I'm going to think out what I can say to Wednesbury."

Wednesbury was our brigadier—on leave at the time. I could see Stanley's difficulty. The novel appearance of the new battalion might be too much for an old dugout like Wednesbury. Stanley went out, and Meyer and I dined alone. During the meal I remembered one question I had meant to put to Stanley.

"By the way," I said, "did they really do a double after the inspection?"

"The devil they did!" exclaimed Meyer. "Full pack and all. They covered a good mile in less than ten minutes."

That night I thought of nothing else. Undoubtedly this Colonial force was a strange lot, but nevertheless a battalion that could conquer a colony on its own, and could make a night march of twenty-five miles, finishing up with another mile at the double—well, there must be something unusual about it. I was quite determined to make its immediate acquaintance.

Before breakfast next morning I was round at the barns allotted to the battalion as billets. Not a soul was to be seen. An inspiration caused me to make for the flat ground by the cemetery. There I saw a scene which beggared any descriptive powers in my possession. The whole of the open space was like a volcanic sea of loose earth. All sorts and conditions of trenches spread in every

direction. The activity was unnatural ; it seemed as if the very surface of the earth wobbled. Then I noticed a stupendous figure making its way towards me. From the description, I guessed that it was that of Major Fermery—although he had thrown his tunic aside, and carried a spade in his hand.

" Major Fermery ? I queried. " My name's Newman. I'm staff captain to the brigade."

" Good man, come along," he said. " Just giving the boys some digging practice. We've had plenty of ordinary war, but not much of this trench business. But we'll soon get used to it. We haven't done a bad amount in three hours, have we ? "

Three hours ! Including two of darkness ! Why they had done more than a pioneer battalion would tackle in a day ! My face betrayed my amazement, but he read it awry.

" I say, we haven't done wrong, digging up the field, have we ? " he asked anxiously. " It was the first place I found, and we wanted some practice. We'll put it all back, of course."

I assured him confidently enough. He was very anxious to " know the ropes " of our ways of doing things. Someone had told him that the general inspection of the previous day had been all wrong. He was not at all abashed.

" Of course, if Duncan had been here it would have been different. He knows more about these

things than I do. I'm more at home in a scrap than on a parade."

I could believe that. I began to draw him out. Of the campaign in North-East Africa he said very little. Of Duncan, too, he said only a few words, but every one of those words was an emphatic one.

"You mark my words, boy," he said, "that lad is the greatest natural leader of men since Moses. Even Napoleon isn't in it. I'm not bragging. Wait till you see him. And look here—remember that I'm saying this now. If the war's still going on in two years' time, just see who's running it."[1]

With him I walked around the flat. True enough, they were an ill-assorted crew. There were at least fifty negroes in the battalion, and a few cross-breeds. More than thirty men sported whiskers of the bushy type. Fermery introduced me to most of the officers. I was most impressed with Fermery himself. He might be unsophisticated in the manners of the Western Front, but his high forehead and quick grasp betokened keen intelligence, just as his huge frame betrayed enormous strength. I could not quite make up my mind about the battalion in general. The fetish of judging a unit by its "military appearance" dies hard in a regimental officer. Yet here was a force

[1] Out of sheer interest, I made a careful note of his exact words at the time. They seem trivial enough now, but then they might have been the subject of some million to one bet.

with an enviable reputation ; every man was in most remarkable fettle, as their work of the past twenty-four hours showed. But I could not dismiss the idea from my mind that the discipline of this medley must be weak. Almost at once I was disabused.

" Well, now," Fermery said, quite casually, " I reckon that's enough for now. We'll just put the dirt back, and then have breakfast. We'll do some more to-morrow. Pass the word along, boys."

Within five minutes the whole scene was changed. Instead of mounds of earth raised by invisible workers, the men themselves appeared on the mounds. I have never seen men work like it. Not a murmur—not a grumble. They laboured cheerfully though silently. The liaison between man and man was perfect. If one spot became overcrowded, men moved away to another without an order of any kind. To me, accustomed to the periodic barks of non-commissioned officers, it all seemed unreal. I watched carefully. Here were nearly a thousand men—and not a sign of a shirker amongst them.

Yes, I had plenty to think about as I rode back to the mess. Fermery's parting words, that he expected Duncan to arrive later in the day, thrilled me with an excitement of anticipation.

I mentioned my visit to Stanley.

" Well, and what do you think of Whiskers ? " he asked. He was still worried, obviously.

" I like Fermery," I said. " He's a fine fellow."

" An ignorant lout," he growled.

" Not a bit of it," I disagreed warmly. " I don't know about his education, but he has a wonderful intelligence. He reminds me of Bernard Shaw."

" He reminds me of McGlusky," he grunted.

I didn't argue, but it seemed to me that we could do with a few McGluskys in the British Army at any time.

I was called out during the day, and it was dark before I returned to H.Q. in that dirty little street in Nœux-les-Mines. I saw a strange face through the window, and, although I cannot explain why, my heart beat as if I were a young girl meeting a lover. The room was lighted only by an oil-lamp. He had turned his back on this and was gazing out of the window, where the instantaneous flash of the gun and the periodic glare of the Very light indicated the perilous monotony of trench warfare. I scanned his face eagerly as I introduced myself. I cannot hope to draw a word portrait that would satisfy me—only an artist could do that. He was tall, but his broad shoulders disguised the fact. His face was tropic tanned and rather lean (it filled out later). His fingers were long and nervous, but his grip was intense. And his eyes—a book could be written about Duncan's eyes. We are familiar with the " piercer " of the successful politician or business magnate : Duncan's eyes

certainly " went through you," but the shaft left no wound behind. His gaze was that of a discerning, benevolent interest. And his voice fascinated me with its rounded firmness. (The only time I have heard anything approaching its purposeful charm was from the lips of Matheson Lang in the last act of *The Wandering Jew*.) It takes a great deal to convince a north-countryman that anyone is his mental superior, but in Duncan I recognised it instinctively. Without debate I agreed with Fermery's estimate of him as a great leader of men. Then, in our first minute together, I got a surprise —a most pleasant one. He expressed his pleasure at bringing his battalion into a Leicestershire brigade, for he was a Leicestershire man himself ! I had not known this, and I was overjoyed. From that moment, it seemed, there was a bond between us. Nevertheless, it was to a trifling incident that occurred on the following day that I believe I owe my long association with him.

General Wednesbury had returned, appalled by the telegram he had received from Stanley. He had asked me to take him to Duncan's regimental headquarters. I knew what he was going to do, and I dropped as many hints as I possibly could. And—I must do the old man justice—he did his task kindly enough. It was an incongruous scene ; we sat in a great farmhouse kitchen. Wednesbury was most cordial in his greeting and in his congratulations on the North-East Africa campaign.

Then he passed, delicately enough, to the other side of the picture. European standards were very high : discipline that might pass in a Colonial war was useless here ; marching order in a jungle was necessarily different from a civilised country, and so on. Duncan let him go on, but if Wednesbury had not been so militarily blind he would have realised that the initiative passed to the other side as he talked.

" I am exceedingly sorry," Duncan said, after Wednesbury had talked himself out, " that my battalion has not entirely pleased you. On one or two points I agree with you : its equipment, for example, was collected as and when was possible—it can now be scrapped and renewed. But as to the men—I will maintain, sir, and I will undertake to prove that this ' scratch force,' as you call it, is second to none in the whole world."

Wednesbury smiled, but I could see that Duncan was serious.

" What makes a soldier efficient ? " Duncan continued. " First, his physical condition. On that point my men will bear comparison with any in history. Their marches in North-East Africa, I believe, break all records. Second, the mental condition of the soldier. This, I know, is not mentioned in most military text-books, but to me it is of prime importance. It is a psychological fact—— But first let me tell you how this battalion came into being.

" When the German force invaded East Africa I collected every man I could lay hands on. I gathered nearly 11,000 men—a motley crowd : farmers, sailors, civil servants, natives, with a few regular soldiers. The Germans at Isooandi were in slightly less force. We beat them off—and I learned my lesson in attempting to follow up the victory. I learned, for example, that some men are excellent soldiers on the defensive, but useless in attack. I learned that ordinary standards of physical vigour are useless in intensive campaigning. I learned that surprise is still the greatest factor in warfare. I learned that one second class man in a first-class company reduces the whole company to second-class rank.

" How could I lead a force of this kind into German territory ? The Government offered me an Indian brigade in addition, but I had already made up my mind. Do you remember the story of Gideon ? How he reduced his army from thirty-two thousand to a mere three hundred men ? And how he won by tactics skilfully executed, where mere numbers of second-class troops would not have prevailed. It is a wonderful story, and there are germs of big ideas in it. Except that I had to substitute science for divine inspiration, I worked somewhat along the same lines. I weeded out men here and there. No man with a blemish of any kind remained. In the end there remained but a little more than a complete battalion. But what

men ! Every one in a magnificent state of physical vigour ; every one mentally alert ; above all, every one determined to see the job through, no matter what it meant for him. A month of special training—intensive training of a type never heard of before—and we were off. You know the result —in six weeks we had conquered a land half the size of Europe."

" Yes, yes, very creditable, very creditable indeed," Wednesbury broke in, " but I still don't quite see——"

" Of course not," Duncan interrupted ; " I can't expect you to—yet. The practical test is the ultimate one. But I am claiming that these men are above the ordinary. In battle, I hope to prove this shortly. At the moment—but let me give you an idea of what I mean. Captain Newman, do you mind summoning a man at random outside—the first man you see."

I stepped to the door and whistled to a private who was crossing the farmyard.

" Ah, Saunders," Duncan addressed him. " You arrived here three days ago ? Good ! You have seen a map of the district ? "

" Yesterday."

" Then describe briefly the route from here to St. Pol."

The man straightened himself up : his eyes rolled slightly. Then he began without hesitation.

" You can best go by way of Bruay. To reach

Bruay you may pass either by Houchin or Ruitz——"

"We will say Ruitz," said Duncan.

"Leaving Nœux-les-Mines by the Hersin road," the man commenced again, quite confidently, "take the second turn to the right eight hundred yards from the village, at the hamlet called Four-à-chaux. Cross the brook Loisne, and mount the slope for 900 yards. There the road forks——"

I need not bore you by the details of the route. Suffice it to say that he was absolutely correct. I was amazed, and Wednesbury was visibly impressed. And when Duncan told Saunders to give him a section in contour from Vermelles to Lens, even the old man burst out.

"But this is remarkable, Duncan," he said. "I know the district thoroughly, but I could not do all this from memory. And do you mean to say that any man in your battalion——"

"Every man," said Duncan. "This is part of their training. I am a great believer in maps. Baldicott, one of my company commanders, was once a professor of geology. He has trained these men—and I have taught them to visualise. Just one other point—will you fetch another man?"

Outside I found a man inspecting the flimsy make-up of the barns. I hauled him in without ceremony.

"Now, Tuck," began Duncan, "I am a German prisoner whom you have just captured. Interrogate me."

And, sure enough, there began a conversation in German—Tuck asking details of his prisoner's rank, regiment, division, and so on; then endeavouring to get out of him more piquant information—where he had come from, was his regiment up to strength, and the rest.

"But, my dear Duncan," Wednesbury broke in again. "Do you mean to say that every man in your battalion speaks German?"

"I do. Some much better than others, of course. Remember that these men have been fighting little detached battles of their own. Are they to bring every prisoner back to Intelligence to be interrogated, when their prisoner may reveal to them the open door? No! My methods of training have been different from yours. We have no fine manners, but every man is a competent, practical soldier. If I may put it briefly, sir, I have worked on a basis different from the normal. Your unit is the Division, the Brigade, the Battalion. My unit is—the Man!"

In spite of himself, Wednesbury was tremendously moved. No wonder. Duncan put his points with a magnetic energy that could not be resisted. In any case, the pudding was there as proof.

"On two points I admit difficulty," Duncan went on, after further conversation. "There is the

question of drill. This I will put in hand at once—not because it is necessary for these particular men, but because their attitude might be misinterpreted by second-class troops. That difficulty is easily disposed of. The other troubles me mightily—Fermery's whiskers. Fermery is tremendously proud of those whiskers. If I told Fermery to throw himself under a steam-roller he would do it—but those whiskers ! I really funk the job."

It was here that I had the brain-wave which, I firmly believe, first aroused Duncan's interest in me—a ridiculous thing for such a foundation.

" Excuse me, sir," I said. " Couldn't you get out of it this way. You know, many of the French soldiers used to wear beards, but when gas attacks started they had to shave them off—one, because gas settles in hair, and, two, because you can't put a gas mask over a beard. So couldn't you——"

" Good man ! " Duncan shouted. A broad smile enlivened his face. " Excellent ! That's easy, then, too." He beamed friendship at me, and I was as pleased as at anything I had ever done. He came back with us to mess for dinner. Wednesbury was very silent, for him, but he was thinking hard. The traditions of a lifetime don't fade away very quickly, and he was trying to get a clear grip of the situation.

I can vividly recall one or two snatches of the conversation over dinner. Stanley led the talk to the subject of discipline ; all the time, of course, he

was aiming at Duncan in that indirect, sarcastic way which I detested—and in that hateful combination of the Guards manner and Oxford accent which he thought denoted breeding.

"Discipline is the first essential in warfare," Stanley concluded a peroration. "Take the Guards. Why, the Guards would march on the enemy as if on parade, until not a man remained."

"Yes, but what on earth is the good of that?" asked Duncan very pertinently. "I think, Major, that you confuse discipline and morale. Morale is essential to all: discipline only to second-class troops."

"Do you mean to say that the Guards are second-class troops?" Stanley demanded incredulously.

"Not necessarily," Duncan replied quite calmly, "I have never seen them in action, so cannot say. All I can say is that what is usually called discipline is merely a vague attempt at a codification of mob instincts. These themselves are built up on certain theses of supposition. Remove but one and the structure falls to the ground. You yourselves do not see the dangers of your own system. Your men will advance in a mob—one, because all do. The imitative instinct is enough. But let one man run away, and the instinct works again; your whole mob may run, too."

Stanley quite failed in the subsequent argument. He merely repeated platitudes. But I was more

moved than I had ever been in all my life. The personality of this man attracted me beyond measure. His mentality, his intelligence, and his great store of knowledge made an instant impression upon me. I recalled again Fermery's emphatic opinion—that he was the greatest natural leader of men since Moses. One remark brought the idea vividly to my mind. Stanley was talking about Fermery's now famous command on the occasion of the general inspection.

"Fall in and follow me," Duncan repeated slowly. "Still, it's not a bad command, after all. 'Fall in'—why, that's quite military, isn't it? And 'Follow me'—well, that's been a very good command for nearly two thousand years."

I walked back with Duncan that night.

"I believe in men," he said, as we tramped the rough pavé. "Machines may come, but they will never replace men. And I believe in quality rather than quantity. It is very sensational for a politician to announce that we have three million men under arms, but what manner of men are they? We take all comers, subject only to a medical examination that means nothing at all. That is not the way to win wars. Cromwell found that out. Maybe we shall find out too."

"Colonel," I blurted out, as we parted, "I shall be spare in a few weeks' time. I am only on the brigade staff temporarily—couldn't you apply for me?"

"My boy," he said—though he was but eight years my senior—"my boy, I have already marked you down. You have a sound frame and a quick wit, and will do me well."

So I strode home exceedingly happy. And to this day I believe that I owe my greatest good fortune to my solution of the problem of Fermery's whiskers.

CHAPTER II

There was unusual excitement at Brigade H.Q. when the division returned to its place in the front line. Normally the change-over operation was only mildly interesting ; long experience of trench warfare had mechanised it. But we were all on nerves-edge about the introduction of Duncan's battalion to Western Front warfare. Stanley was—or pretended to be—alarmed : he worked out some scheme for extra reliefs in close supports. Wednesbury, however, would have none of it. By this time —whatever he might think of the appearance of the new force—he was quite convinced as to the quality of its men. For that matter, even the outward shape of the battalion had altered beyond recognition. Their new uniforms were, of course, uniform—and Fermery and his colleagues had bade a sad farewell to their whiskers. As for me, I was anxious and yet confident. My admiration for Duncan and his men was of the highest, yet I thought winter warfare in muddy trenches might prove too dismal an experience to men accustomed to tropic marches.

The night before the relief I walked down to Duncan's billet. He was out, but his batman

directed me to a Y.M.C.A. hut near by. One soon got used to strange but common scenes with Duncan's men. From the hut I heard no care-free voices yelling the latest popular songs. On the concert stage I saw Captain Liberty with a group of men. I paused as I passed by—to discover a German lesson in progress. The rest of the men were scattered in tiny groups ; most of them appeared to be playing chess or draughts. So I thought, until I joined the nearest group. The game was not chess, nor was it draughts. The playing-board was large : upon it was a model, roughly executed in cardboard and mud ; I saw zigzag fissures here and there. The players, from time to time, moved cardboard pieces of varied shapes. For a moment I could not grasp the idea : then I was dumbfounded. No, these men were not playing the game of chess or the game of draughts, but the game of war ! Here was a trench model : those shapes represented men and guns : the players were the attackers and defenders. In dead silence the game went on. I watched for half an hour, so interested that I scarcely seemed to breathe. Here was a new note struck in the uninspired routine of battalion training. At last one of the players—the defender—spoke :

" I've got you, Jem. I've got you enfiladed here. Look—you didn't notice this machine-gun. Isn't the game mine ? " he turned to a man by his side —an umpire, I found.

"Yes, it's your game. You made a bad miss there, Jem. You ought to have pushed out a patrol along this trench : along these shell-holes they could have worked round to the rear."

This was true, although it would have been a bold operation. But I was soon to learn not to judge these men by ordinary standards.

Another pair took over the board. I will admit that I was thrilled. There was a touch of genius in the idea. And these men handled tactical problems like masters. My eyes were shining with excitement when Duncan found me.

"You like my war game?" he asked.

"It's wonderful—marvellous!" I said. "And these men—but will they be so calculating under fire?"

"They will," he replied, with confidence that was not a fraction over-emphasised. "My methods may be strange, but no one can say that they are not thorough. I have studied war for over a year, but I have studied men all my life. Believe me, these men will not fail. On the contrary——"

I believed him. And as they marched along the Vermelles road the following night I ran after them to shout a final message of good cheer.

Their part of the line was not of the easiest. The left flank hinged on the Chalk Pit in front of Loos, and the battalion front ran along the western slopes of the so-called Hill 70, the ridge

which we had won and lost again a month before. Everywhere the enemy had the advantage of the high ground. No general attack was to be feared, but parts of the line were at the mercy of enemy snipers and bombing-posts.

The next night I found an excuse to visit Duncan at his trench H.Q. I had telephoned to him during the day, and found him quite happy.

"Everybody fairly comfortable, thanks," he answered my enquiry. "Not a casualty during the relief, but two men wounded during the day. One of these sniper posts must be dealt with seriously. My only grumble is that our line is so wet—by the lie of the land our trenches drain the Germans'!"

I was able to give him a few tips as to the best ways of dealing with mud. I felt utterly confident. My last anxieties had faded away.

Three nights passed before we—and the British Army, for that matter—got the shock of our lives. About one o'clock in the morning (I was on duty for the night) the telephone bell rang. It was Duncan calling. How I did not collapse I don't know.

"Hullo," he said, "is that Newman? I thought that you might like to know that we've taken Hill 70."

"What?" I yelled. "What do you mean?"

"Well, we couldn't stand being a mere drainage

trench any longer, so we thought we'd move to the top of the hill."

"But—but——" I was almost incoherent. Then I had sense enough to send an orderly to wake General Wednesbury.

He could not believe what I told him : nor could he believe Duncan's own word. Everything was so utterly incredible. Within two minutes Wednesbury had made up his mind : leaving Stanley in charge of H.Q., we rushed up to Duncan's dugout. It took us nearly two hours, though we ran all the way after leaving the car. Neither of us really believed that Hill 70 was actually ours. But outside Duncan's H.Q. we had our first concrete evidence : three or four hundred prisoners were being passed down a communication trench. Old Wednesbury's face, as he saw them, was a study.

"Ah, just in time!" said Duncan gaily, as we stumbled into the dugout. "I expect the fun will begin soon. The Bosche doesn't realise what has happened yet. In any case, he doesn't know where he is and where he isn't. He daren't counter-attack yet. He's plastering our old front line, but there's hardly anybody in it. I've warned our artillery to stand by."

"But what does all this mean?" asked Wednesbury. I never saw the old man so flabbergasted.

"As I said before, sir," Duncan said—kindly enough, as if he realised Wednesbury's difficulty

of comprehension—" we've taken Hill 70, and are holding the old German support line just over the crest. They will counter-attack, but we shall hold on—never fear that. About 300 prisoners have been passed down, but there should be plenty more—the boys are still mopping up the dugouts."

The word " mopping " seemed to remind Wednesbury that he was perspiring, and he produced a handkerchief. Several minutes passed before he could frame coherently intelligent questions.

" Oh, yes, I had quite decided to do something drastic several days ago," said Duncan. " I don't mind trenches being waterlogged, but when that water really belongs to the Germans—well, there's a limit ! But I didn't expect to move quite so soon. To-night, however, Fermery decided that the sniper's post to the north of the ridge must be dealt with. He did it, and captured the Bosche alive. We talked to him, and he cursed his bad luck—that very night his battalion was to be relieved. Here was a stroke of luck—a chance too good to be missed. You've seen my niggers—I have some wonderful scouts among them. Between them, they cleared a hundred yards of trench without a shot being fired. Through the gap I passed two companies—Nixon's and Thom's. Nixon moved quickly and quietly to the support line, leaving a platoon with bombs at

each communication trench. Thom spread himself along the ridge, and then came back towards our line. This was all in silence, you understand—the army moved on its stomach, for the most part. Sentries took little notice till it was too late, thinking the movement was part of the relief. Then the fun began. It was in the communication trenches that the damage was done : those platoons said it was sheer murder. Thom had an easy job. I have never known any troops that would stand against a night attack in the rear. And remember that these poor beggars had only been there about half an hour. They surrendered wholesale. Thom is still fishing them up."

" But—but why wasn't I told—why ? " asked Wednesbury. He was almost pathetic.

" I'm sorry if I've overstepped anything," said Duncan. " But there was hardly time for consultation—the scouts were out within ten minutes of the prisoner being brought in."

" But your casualties ? "

" Very small, so far—less than 50. Of course, there will be counter-attacks at dawn. But we shall deal with them."

I could understand Wednesbury's feelings. Could he really sanely report to Debeney that we had taken Hill 70 ? Yet something must be done. Immediately he made his decision. He would go and see for himself—quickly, before the counter-attack developed.

The old man did not lack personal courage at any time. The communication trenches were blocked, so he climbed into the rough. One of Duncan's niggers guided us.

We passed our old front line at a run, for it was being shelled heavily. Through a gap in our wire we dashed up the slope : I saw signals men working like demons to get a wire to an artillery observation post on the crest. Yes, everything was as Duncan said. This was no dream. Fifty yards down the slope we heard the dull sound of spade against earth, where Nixon's men were working against the dawn.

Wednesbury went back to report, excitedly happy. I stayed with the F.O.O.[1] I wanted to see the fun. I knew Dayton well—a fine man for the job, though but a subaltern. He was as collected as a dowager, which was just as it should be. I regret to say that I was as excited as a girl at her first party.

It was evident that Duncan was right when he hinted that the Bosche didn't quite know where he was. With his relief captured wholesale and his retiring troops wiped up in the communication trenches, no wonder that his rear was in disorder. Actually, it was nearly eight o'clock before his counter-attack began. Dayton was not yet in touch, but our guns were plastering the Bosche supports liberally. The Bosche came on with his

[1] Forward Observation Officer.

usual pluck—two battalions strong, I should estimate. It was then I saw a sight which had hardly been repeated since the first days of the war—a German charge in mass formation over open ground. And I saw too what Duncan often talked about later—the devastating effect of really well-directed rifle-fire. It was incredible. The attack simply melted away—not a man reached our line. Half an hour later the artillery preparation for a second attack began. Duncan, who had joined us on the ridge, was not concerned about this—there were plenty of dugouts for the outlying company. Then it was Dayton's turn. Back came a message. "Enemy massing in sunken road E.5 b.9." By this time the telephone was working, and a minute later shells were shrieking over our heads like a flock of frightened gulls. The attack was decimated before it started; it crumbled to pieces as soon as it got within effective rifle range. I only wished Stanley had been there to see it. This was better than watching Guards on parade!

Duncan was happy, but not one-tenth as exuberant as I was. I don't think he really grasped the magnitude of the thing he had done. Afterwards he told me that the whole thing seemed to him absurdly simple compared with some of the tasks he had tackled in North-East Africa.

The capture of Hill 70 is now ancient history,

and does indeed seem a paltry affair when compared with Duncan's later exploits.[1] Yet few people realise how vitally it affected Duncan's future career. Under any circumstances, Duncan would without doubt have forged ahead, and might have finished up as a divisional, or even a corps, commander. Yet it has seldom been remarked that Hill 70 was captured on the day after Sir John Douglas became Commander-in-Chief in France. I shall be able to show that this coincidence—for it was nothing more—vitally affected the course of the war.

Much to his disgust, Duncan's battalion was withdrawn from the line immediately. This was the usual custom, of course—the normal reason being that an attacking force usually suffered heavy casualties. I firmly believe that Duncan was thinking out a scheme for pressing home his success (he admitted this, in fact, later).

Ex-service men among my readers will remember the sensation caused by the capture of Hill 70. At the time everyone was feeling rather down as a result of the failure of our autumn offensive. Then, amidst the gloom of "what might have been," came the incredible news that a single battalion had won what two divisions had failed to take ! The enthusiasm was immense. It

[1] For a further account of the capture of Hill 70 see Chapter VIII. of *The Battles of Artois*, by Major E. F. Marchant. This explains Duncan's tactical stroke in detail, and has useful large-scale maps.

happened, too, that the censorship was relaxed at the time, and Duncan's name was freely mentioned. It became a name on every man's lips. This was really remarkable, for the ignorance of the British soldier of his leaders was abysmal. I met thousands of men who did not even know the name of their own divisional commander. But the Press seized on the liberty which followed the absurd repression of the earlier part of the war. At the moment there was nothing happening on any other part of the front. So the war correspondents let themselves go. Newspapers dug out the details of the campaigns in North-East Africa. Where details were lacking, imaginative writers filled them in. Owing to these circumstances, the exploit received more publicity than any previous operation of the war. This, as we shall see, also had a great deal to do with Duncan's subsequent career. Yet, as I have said, this was even more largely affected by his first interview with Sir John Douglas.

It was natural enough that the C.-in.-C. was extremely pleased with such a wonderful success on the second day of his command. At the least, it was a happy augury. He lost little time in motoring from St. Omer to Nœux-les-Mines. Neither he nor Duncan is likely to forget their first meeting. And I must confess to a thrill as I saw them together. Sir John represented the finest type of British regular officer. His grey hair and moustache

matched his clean-cut features. He was almost old enough to be Duncan's father, yet only his hair betrayed his years. After the formal salute they stood for a moment with hands locked : it seemed as if each instinctively recognised the greatness of the other. Here I will put on record only essential fragments of their conversation—which lasted a whole afternoon.

Douglas's congratulations about Hill 70 were simple but sincere. He asked for full details of the operation. That brought up the subject of night attacks, which in turn raised Duncan's favourite topic—men.

"I am a great believer in night attacks," Duncan explained. "The advantages are elementary. Why not attack an enemy when he cannot see to shoot at you? But there are many disadvantages, of course. Night fighting requires a high degree of initiative among men, and a different kind of courage. The enemy is more easily rattled by night alarms, but it is easier for your own men to get rattled too. Therefore, it seems to me, night attacks should only be carried out by superior troops, specially trained to such work. My men, if I may so claim, fulfil these conditions. But how, then, to attack by night? A frontal advance, in these days of barbed wire and Very lights, would be suicide. No! My idea —and this is not the first time I have practised it—is to cross the enemy's line on a very narrow

front. It does not matter if his line closes up again, cutting off your force, for your men are now in the best position for attack. I have never met or heard of troops who can withstand a night attack in the rear. Yes, I think my training is justified," he said, replying to a leading question from General Wednesbury. "See its results in one minor operation. First, my insistence on my men learning German. Suppose the sniper we captured had been brought to Intelligence at H.Q. in the ordinary way—we should have lost the invaluable opportunity of attacking during the confusion of the relief. Second, the scouting training—particularly with a view to silent and swift movement, using every particle of cover. This enabled me to pass two companies behind the Bosche line before anyone realised what was happening : at the most, a raid was suspected. Another point—in an ordinary force the immediate attack would have been impracticable on account of rationing difficulties. These did not arise in the case of these two companies, since an occasional two-day fast is part of our routine training. Third, my war game, played with exact models of this part of the line. Every man knew where he was : every man knew the right thing to do—how to position himself—almost without command being given."

Dusk was already falling when the critical part of the conversation was reached. These two

men already seemed to understand one another. As I looked at them I thought: "Age and Experience, Youth and Inspiration—what a fighting team!"

"Well, Colonel," Sir John Douglas said after a very full discussion of many things, including war in general, "I need hardly say that your promotion to the rank of brigadier-general will follow immediately. For that matter, it had previously been decided upon, so soon as you had accustomed yourself to Western Front methods. But I confidently anticipate still further advancement in the very near future."

"Ah, you will excuse me, sir," Duncan exclaimed. "I should dearly love to command a brigade, but it would give me little pleasure unless it fitted in with my own ideas."

"You mean?"

"May I pick my own men? May I select officers and men likely to equal those I now command? Listen!" In his earnestness Duncan frequently seemed to overlook the great disparity in rank. However, I suppose equality in intellect has a silent way of asserting itself. "Listen! All men are *not* equal. The opposite may be excellent as a political catchword, but it is not true. Men never will be, never can be, equal, we know that—yet we don't act upon it. We treat all divisions, for example, as if they were equal. We know they are not. We know that one or two

of the old regular divisions, the Guards, and a few of the New Army and Colonial divisions, are far superior to any others. Yet we give all similar work to do. We put a good division alongside a weak one, and expect the two to do equally well. But the pace of a cavalcade is the pace of the slowest horse. So the good division finds itself badly hampered by the weak division. We ought to sort ourselves out. In the French and German armies a casual sorting is already done—their divisions are composed of different classes of men. But this is too haphazard—you cannot classify soldiers by their ages. I would like to see each man performing the task for which he is most fitted. Some are born to attack : some are great in defence. The Germans are now toying with the idea, in their 'storm-troops.' We want to get ahead of them : we want to go much further too. I would be proud to lead such a force. Let me gather my men where I can best find them. I can promise you that they will be a useful crowd."

"I can well believe that," said Sir John. He was thinking hard. "Your idea attracts me immensely. And yet I foresee many difficulties. Suppose we carried out your scheme to the full—skimming the cream of all our force in order to produce a few super-divisions. The remainder of the army would be reduced to a dangerously low level."

"Not necessarily. First, because the average quality is already high. Second, because the second-class divisions would be well-officered, and well disciplined, and used for only second-class work. Third, because the exploits of these super-divisions would tend to raise the morale of the whole army, since mankind is essentially imitative. But let us definitely try to fit each man in the job he can do best. . . . In our fifty divisions we may have ten that are useful only for holding quiet sections of lines—as the French second-line territorials do down in Lorraine. We should have about thirty good average divisions—after our present standard. But the other ten—man, what an army we could make !—who could stand against it? There is an Arnold van Winkelreid in every battalion. He is very useful. But suppose you had a few battalions of Arnold van Winkelreids !"

It seemed to me that the C.-in-C. was torn in two. The idea of an army of picked men naturally appealed to any commander. Yet, there were dangers. Douglas left before any decision was made : but it was obvious that he had not ceased consideration.

Three days later Duncan received the official intimation of his promotion to brigadier-general. And following it up came a letter from Sir John Douglas. He recalled the conversation of a few days before. He had decided, he said, to experiment

with Duncan's plan—in a small way, at any rate. He proposed to form a special brigade, of which the North-East African battalion would be the nucleus. The formation of the other three battalions was a matter of difficulty. Obviously, Duncan could not spend all his time wandering up and down France picking up odd men here and there. Yet there were certain units from which he might choose freely. The second Naval Division, for example, was shortly to be disbanded—he would find some good material there. There were several brigades in process of reorganisation—he should have the first choice of the surplus men. If necessary, the special brigade might consist of three strong battalions only. He promised every possible support, and hinted at minor operations which the new force might be called upon to undertake.

This letter, which is published verbatim elsewhere,[1] is rather important. Ignorant people, confused by the momentous events of the ultimate months of the war, have suggested that Douglas, jealously recognising Duncan's superior ability, tried to belittle his proposals and to keep him in complete subordination. Yet this letter proves that it was Douglas who gave Duncan his first real chance. Indeed, I do not think I overstated the case when I said that it was by chance that

[1] *Intimate Pictures of Sir John Douglas*, Captain Harry Donn, A.D.C., p. 294.

Duncan's meteoric career received its most vital impulse. Had the capture of Hill 70 not happily coincided with the appointment of the new C.-in-C., it is improbable that Douglas would have taken the unusual step of paying a special visit to a regimental officer. Yet, had that meeting never materialised, the history of the world might have been changed—unquestionably for the worse.

I, too, have reason to remember the day Douglas's letter arrived. I was with Duncan well into the night. He spoke little, but his mind was working at full pressure. His utter confidence never showed itself in careless hilarity, but in a rhythmic quietness.

"We shall have to split up the job, or it will take too long," he said. "I want to get the brigade into being quickly. I can soon find out any misfits when we start training. But Thom will be invaluable—he's a trained psychologist, of course. And Fermery, though he couldn't spell that word, is one of the best natural judges of men. I shall choose all the officers myself. I have chosen one already."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes—you," he said.

I blushed. I stammered out excited thanks. But he cut me short.

"Mind, you've got some work to do," he said, a stern kindness in his eyes. "You're fairly fit—but Fermery will have to take you in hand.

You know a little about the ordinary things of war—but you've got a lot to learn about the extraordinary things. And you must study men. Always study men ! But you've got it in you, and you can do it. You can be useful straight away, for you do know more of military manners than I do. You had better come as my staff captain, I think. You will not fail me."

I knew that I would not. His confidence was magnetic—that was one of his greatest assets. A man who met Duncan never afterwards dreamed of failure.

I was quite in the dark as to his method of selecting men, although I accompanied him at every inspection and interview. But times without number I met examples of his incisive mental penetration. He seemed to read the other man's mind. Sometimes it was almost uncanny.

" Excuse me," I said, as a young officer left our presence, and Duncan crossed his name off our list, " excuse me, but why do you turn him down ? I know Wilton quite well—he's a fine regimental officer."

" I can see that—a fine fellow altogether," Duncan agreed. " Clean body, clean mind, sound frame, keen brain—yes, it went against the grain to turn him down. Yet he won't do—he has something on his mind."

" I don't quite get you," I said.

" Didn't you watch his eyes when I mentioned

that our brigade was marked out for specially dangerous jobs, so that our casualty lists might be unusually high? Ah, you should have done that. For one twentieth of a second his eyelids raised and his eyes stared. Then he said—without apparent hesitation—that he was ready for anything. But he was too late. He has something on his mind."

"I can't think of anything," I commented. "He has no troubles, to my knowledge: he was only married about six weeks ago."

"Ah, there you have it! No, newly married men are no use to me. Fight?—of course they will, and well. But remember that I am going to ask these men to do more than fight—to take more than ordinary risks. And at a critical moment he might think of his wife—at a moment when he ought to be getting himself killed for the good of the rest of us. No, I'd like that man in one of my defence divisions. There he'd fight like hell, because the inspiration is right."

"Always watch a man's eyes," Duncan said, as another man went out. "The eyes are the most sensitive spots in the human frame. Now that fellow lied when he assured me that he had kept clean of wine and women. His eyes gave him away. It is very useful to know when a man is telling the truth. Signs vary across the globe. Many men perspire when they lie—they are easy. If an Indian moves his feet about as he talks he is

lying. But the eyes are the most delicate indicators. I have never yet met a man who could lie with his eyes."

I do not propose to describe in detail the psychological tests on which Duncan based his selection, because I know that Thom has a book in preparation on this very subject—and he is infinitely better qualified to deal with it than I am. In any case, in those early days I knew too little of Duncan's mind. I trusted his judgment implicitly, but without understanding. The net result, with which I was principally concerned, was that from a total of more than 20,000 men we made up two complete battalions, with an additional 500 men as a depôt reserve.

Then we went into training. And what training it was ! Duncan left his original battalion in the line, with Fermery in command, so that it could obtain a little more experience of trench life. He himself took charge of the training area behind Bethune which had been allotted to us. He allowed himself six weeks for the task. The men responded wonderfully. Although irregular in height and military uniformity, they were magnificent material. Duncan and the others had certainly chosen well.[1]

[1] Out of, approximately, 2,500 men selected, only 51 proved unsatisfactory. Of these, 21 could not survive the tremendous physical demands, 4 were sent back to their old units for improper conduct—drunkenness in each case—15 were "sick" casualties, and 11 left the brigade at their own request when they realised everything that it entailed.

It would be idle to describe the details of the training, since these are now incorporated in the *Army Training Regulations*. Abnormal fitness in body and mind was the aim.

" You begin to see what I want ? " Duncan used to say in turn to each platoon. " The British Army can fight, and the British Army can march twenty miles a day. What I want is a brigade that can march twenty miles *and then fight*. You will be in that state very soon—I have no fear of that. And I want you to think about war. Do you remember the cockney boy's cricket comment, ' Wilfred Rhodes, 'e don't bowl 'em out, 'e finks 'em out ! ' That's the idea. It isn't just a matter of knowing a few dodges of trench warfare—you fellows are not going to be frittered away in trenches. You've got to study war in theory as well as practice. You've got to be more than efficient in rifle and bayonet work, of course—and in all the rest of the regimental training. But, at the same time, you must look on war with staff eyes. When you make an attack I want you to understand *why* you make that attack, and why it is done in the manner I direct. Then you will know how to exploit the success you win. That is important. None of the Allied or enemy armies has succeeded in doing that yet. But we shall do it, on a small scale, anyway. But remember, it is essential that every individual should be a thinker. I have spoken to you about infiltration after an attack. Then each will

command himself. You will be far beyond my reach—I shall not be able to get into touch with you. You will have to decide—not the safest thing to do, but the best way in which you can injure the enemy. Never forget that one live Britisher behind the German lines could do more damage than a whole battalion in trenches. Two men and a machine-gun at Aulnoye Junction could hold up the German Army. One day some of you men will find yourselves in this kind of position. You must be ready to exploit it to the full."

As the weeks passed on, the training became more intense. We had been rejoined by the North-East Africa battalion,[1] by this time well inured to trench life. Now manœuvres took the place of physical training. Strange manœuvres they were, too. The idea of infiltration, which now seems normal, was then in its infancy. Duncan, although its inventor, had yet to see it in actual practice on a large scale. But he had no doubts—there was to be no experimental stage. It was wonderful how the men took to the tactics. They moved to the attack in battalions, leapfrogging one another as they passed the various " enemy " lines. The final permanent defences passed, each unit was left to its own devices. The general plan was : (*a*) the

[1] Actually, for purely practical reasons, the three battalions of the brigade were transferred shortly afterwards to that ubiquitous regiment, the Royal Fusiliers. They became the 31st, 32nd, and 33rd Battalions of this famous corps.

battalion left in the rear by the final leapfrogging divided on its centre, making the flanks secure ; (*b*) the front battalion consolidated the final position, and spread out posts in a fan-shaped design ; (*c*) the centre battalion passed through these, and immediately split up into units of such size as the occasion demanded. These units, whether a company or a couple of men, were to push north, south, and east into the enemy back areas. Thereafter the results depended entirely upon local initiative. Military critics will recognise that here we have, in miniature, the essentials of the subsequent battle of Lens and Lille, the most momentous and mighty conflict in the history of the world.

The men applied to the work a remarkable vigour and aptitude. Their initiative astonished me. I was quite prepared for unusual physical energy and stamina, but is was amazing how rapidly intelligent appreciation of local tactics was engendered. I can say without hesitation that few men in the brigade knew less of the art of war than did the average company commander. Duncan was delighted with his men. Obviously, they could do great things. I remember him coming back to mess after three days' open manœuvres.

" Suppose," he said to Fermery and myself, " suppose the brigade rushed a sector of the enemy line. Now, the difficulty is, not the advance, but the consolidation of positions and the

maintenance of flanks. But suppose, instead of bothering ourselves about these, we managed to pass right through the German lines. What would happen? "

" We should never come back," I said.

" Very probably," he agreed. " But it would be worth it. Scattered over an area, we could do an enormous amount of damage, and inflict startling casualties before we were wiped out. We might even force a local or major retirement. We should certainly force the Germans to revise their back-area system, and to employ far more troops there. Yes, it would be worth it."

He got up suddenly and went out. We knew well enough that he wanted to be alone. It was three hours before he returned. His eyes were shining. I knew that his thinking had been good.

" We are almost ready to start on our job," he said next morning. " Now, only one part is difficult. We have got to be modest, yet at the same time we must let everybody—friends and enemies—know that we are a super corps. We'll take friends first. Our enemies will learn it soon enough. It seems absurd, but we must think out a few stunts. It isn't what I would choose, but I have no choice. One of my aims is to raise the general standard throughout the army, and—what's the record forced march? " he asked suddenly.

"I really don't know."

"Then find out, and then plan out a route that knocks it silly," he said. "That will do, for a start. Yes, our first job is to surprise our friends."

CHAPTER III

I have already affirmed that it was Duncan's first meeting with Sir John Douglas that marks the beginning of his advancement. It is equally true that his meeting with the Right Honourable Worton Spender, P.C., M.P., hardly ranks second in importance.

This took place just after the brigade's first appearance in the line. There it had distinguished itself by making life a most unholy misery to the Bavarian division opposing it. There was no point in any local advance in this sector[1]—and Duncan had been warned that he must not undertake any action which might become general. So we confined ourselves to "stunts," with the double object of working up our home reputation and of terrorising the enemy. We succeeded in both. The British Tommy, always ready with suitable nomenclature,[2] had dubbed us the "Iron Brigade." He might have chosen worse. As for the poor Bavarians, they thought themselves opposed by devils. Four times in a fortnight were their front trenches captured in night attacks. Each time

[1] To the south-east of Armentières.

[2] Was there ever a British division that did not call itself a "Flying Division"?

—since there was no point in holding them—we staffed them with dummies, and waited to mow down the counter-attacks from the comparative security of our own line. It was very amusing to see Jerry blowing his own trenches—empty—into fragments. And the booby traps we left behind—hardly a man but invented one of his own. Nearly 400 prisoners were captured in these extended raids, and the enemy's other casualties must have been exceedingly high. So we came out of the line very happy. Duncan meant to employ the rest interval for the formation of his fourth battalion. By this time he was receiving offers of service from all parts of the British front. The idea of the "super-force" had leaked out—there was no reason why it should be kept secret—and the number of men who wanted to be in it was amazingly large. We could not avail ourselves of all offers, of course, but we had the remnants of a brigade and a cavalry regiment from which to choose.

"Good business to-day," Duncan said, after a long series of inspections and interviews. "These cavalrymen are great stuff. I am taking nearly a third of them. If we can only get them to march well, they will be real assets."

"Who is going to command the new battalion?" I asked later.

"I don't know yet, but I don't anticipate a great deal of trouble over that."

"Why don't you get Worton Spender," I said jokingly.

"Worton Spender?"

"Yes, I see in the *Continental Daily Mail* that he has had his final row with the Prime Minister, has chucked up his job in the Cabinet, and has come out to France to join his regiment."

"What's that?"

"I believe he's a Major in the Oxford and Bucks Hussars. But there's a rumour that he is to be given the command of an infantry battalion. Why not ours?"

I was joking, of course, and was surprised to notice that Duncan seemed to take it more seriously. My astonishment was much greater, however, two days later, when Spender himself walked into Brigade H.Q. and asked for Duncan. (How the two got into touch I do not know to this day.) He talked to me pleasantly while waiting. I was a wee bit awe-struck at first—it is not often that a staff captain entertains an ex-Cabinet Minister. But his genial manner was infectious; his enthusiasm for "the new idea," as he called our brigade, was without limit. He jumped up as Duncan entered, and they greeted each other cordially. They had met before, when Duncan had reported to the Cabinet on North-East Africa. They passed into Duncan's room, and were closeted there for an hour or more. Then:

"Newman," said Duncan, "meet Lieutenant-Colonel Spender, commanding the 34th Battalion Royal Fusiliers."

This time I was not surprised. I had an inkling by now of what was happening. How Duncan managed to pull all the necessary strings I do not know, but he usually got his own way. Spender jokingly told me, months afterwards, that there was no difficulty in arranging things—that he had never seen such unanimity as to his own future. Duncan wanted him because he was the man for the job; Spender wanted to come; and the Cabinet wanted it too, since his early death would relieve them of a problem! It is certain, however, that Worton Spender was a great asset to us. While he had had some small experience in Colonial wars, he was not saturated with pre-war military fetishes, and his agile mind readily accepted and absorbed new notions. His very presence, too, gave the brigade a certain amount of tone. True, I thought at first that he and Duncan might find it difficult to work together: two strong mentalities are always liable to clash—and Spender was not used to playing second fiddle. But, to do him justice, he recognised a master mind when he saw it, and Duncan never had a more loyal or zealous subordinate. On one particular occasion, as I shall show, he was worth his weight in refined gold.

Duncan was well satisfied with his brigade after

its first period in the line. It had done great business, and its casualties had been abnormally small. (I might here correct a very erroneous impression—prevalent even to-day—that Duncan's men were of sheer, reckless daring. Nothing is further from the truth. Daring they were, of course, for no man was admitted to the force who valued his life so much as to shrink from losing it. But all Duncan's training was to one end—the substitution of thoughtful courage for mere recklessness. The British soldier, as a general rule, was far too careless. Thousands of men lost their lives through not taking elementary precautions : our dugouts, for example, were not to be classed in strength and labour with those made by the Germans. Duncan would never tolerate a " line of least resistance " that might lead nowhere. On the proper occasion he would not hesitate to incur heavy casualties, but a wasted life was a matter of the greatest concern. The Iron Brigade, so far from being reckless, took no unnecessary chances. Hence, although carrying out a succession of raiding attacks,[1] their casualties were below even the usual " wastage " of trench warfare.)

It was shortly after the advent of Worton Spender that Duncan was enabled to put one of

[1] Their immunity from the comparatively heavy casualties usually attending such attacks is due to the fact that the men were specialists in night fighting—at which the Germans were singularly weak.

his theories into practice. Sir John Douglas continued to take the deepest interest in the brigade—and this interest was sealed by his close personal friendship with Spender. So it came about that we received many visits from the C.-in-C. It was on the occasion of one of these visits—an informal one—that the plans were made.

Sir John was hinting to Duncan over dinner that soon he would have his wish, and would be involved in heavy fighting on a grand scale. It was an open secret, of course, that the enemy was mounting two great attacks : one against the French at Verdun, and the second—slightly smaller but formidable enough—against us at Arras. Sir John was quite confident about his ability to meet the attack. But Duncan, with that uncannily instantaneous perception of his, saw that something was on his mind. With the adroitness of a diplomat he drew the secret out. While Sir John's confidence about beating off the attack was absolutely genuine, he was afraid that the losses he would necessarily incur might weaken his plans for a summer offensive on an enormous scale. We knew that this was projected, and saw the point. Duncan seemed to have anticipated it, and stepped in at once with his own scheme. Its total cost would not be more than 200 men, he argued, even if it failed—a fifth of an average day's casualties ! The argument went home, and when Sir John Douglas returned to G.H.Q. that night

Duncan went with him, to arrange the necessary details with the Chief of the General Staff.

The reader, familiar with current or subsequent histories of the war, will know that a great offensive entailed an enormous amount of preparation. In particular, it was necessary to accumulate huge stocks of ammunition in the battle area. These dumps, together with the necessary railway and other communications for the effective distribution of troops, were the real keys to the attack. On this basis Duncan built. How, then, to seize the keys? I think I have already mentioned the plan—the slipping of a company of men behind the enemy lines, there to execute as much damage as was possible. Attleby's company of the 32nd Battalion was selected for the job. According to his custom, Duncan gave every man an opportunity of withdrawing—since it was hardly feasible that a solitary man would ever return.[1] But there was not one waverer in the whole company. They entered into their special training with vigour and spirit. It is marvellous how strongly the primitive instinct of destruction still survives in the human mind. With great glee these men learned the best methods of demolishing bridges and of blowing up ammunition dumps. These had, perforce, to be accomplished with whatever instruments and materials were at hand,

[1] Actually, seven of the company did regain our lines. About forty were wounded and taken prisoner, the rest killed.

since obviously nothing could be carried. But Duncan's mental agility induced fertility of imagination in others, novel ideas resulting. Attleby told me before he set off that his men were thoroughly conversant with forty-five methods of destroying a bridge. Each man, too, had memorised the map of the area allotted to him ; details of all known ammunition and supply dumps had been added.

Duncan's plan was a mixture of minutely detailed accuracy combined with elasticity. The whole brigade was to attack on a front of over a mile, and was to overrun the enemy's battle positions—that is to say, it would penetrate at least as far as his third line. The attack would be made at night, without artillery preparation, but with the subtleties of detail at which Duncan was a master and the brigade apt pupils. In the confusion in the enemy's lines, the " Free Company," as Duncan called it, was to pass through our flanks—approximately a hundred men at either end. The operation safely completed, the brigade was to withdraw immediately to our own lines. The Free Company, once let loose, was to split up at once into groups of two or three men. Each group had an allotted area, but if in actual practice it could not arrive there it was simply to do all the damage it could. The success of the operation depended almost entirely on the initiative of the individual, and of the degree of

this we had no doubt. The crux of the whole plan was the destruction of the Douai—Arras railway—the main line of communication by which the proposed German attack would be served. Obviously, the line must be cut as far in the rear as possible, so Attleby and thirty selected men were detailed for this duty. While it was feasible that all the advanced ammunition dumps might be reached and destroyed in a single night, all men surviving were to secrete themselves by day and emerge the following night. Only when their case became hopeless were they to surrender. All of them were equipped with captured German rifles, so that the ammunition problem was not insuperable. All carried three days' emergency rations.

Every detail of the plan was worked out by Duncan himself, G.H.Q. wisely refraining from interfering. But it was left to Sir John Douglas to settle one important point—the date of the attack. It was known that the German offensive was timed for the end of February. Should we attack at once, before his preparations were half completed, or should we wait till everything was ready? Eventually, on Duncan's advice, the latter course was followed. He argued that a premature attack might allow the Germans to repair the damage in time, but a successful attack on the eve of the offensive must necessarily involve its postponement.

There is one small point that is worthy of notice. A second brigade—drawn from the 15th Division —was to occupy our support lines while the attack was being made. These troops, together with all the artillery and all auxiliary forces in the area, were placed at Duncan's orders. He was thus commanding practically the effective force of a division for the occasion.

The complete success of the hazardous enterprise is a matter of history. Companies advanced in single file, in order to simplify wire-cutting ordeals. The very novelty of the tactics ensured success. No attempt was made to " capture " the trenches, as ordinarily understood. The battalions simply passed over them, leaving them still garrisoned. It was found, in fact, that hundreds of Germans were unaware that we had passed at all : they had their disillusionment a few hours later. Only the 34th Battalion had any difficulty : they had the ill-luck to run into a working party which had time to give an alarm. Spender, however, resourcefully rushed his men forward, and his section of the trench lines saw a vicious hand-to-hand struggle.

An advance of three kilometres in an hour ! And at night ! Such a thing had not been accomplished during the war. True, the German lines had not been " mopped up," but that could be done later. The point was that, within five minutes of the scheduled time, Attleby and his

Free Company were passed over the last main line of the trenches, and were disappearing through the moonless night on their hazardous errand.

Thereafter the story of this unique attack is a matter of individual narrative. I imagine that most of the men of the Free Company had adventures enough to write a stirring book. One of them, of course, has done so, in a volume which deserves to become a classic.[1] I will reproduce here only the narrative of Private Henry Williams, who managed to regain our lines, and who afterwards became my batman. I omit many lurid but unnecessary adjectives which lend extra colour to his spoken story.

"Corporal Gossett, Bill Taylor, and me were told to hang together. We passed out of touch with the rest near Monchy le Preux, and bore north-east till we struck the railway north of Rœux. This took nearly an hour, for we met a good many Bosche ration parties, and had to dodge sentries every few hundred yards. As soon as we got out of the area of the brigade attack, things seemed to be pretty normal with Jerry. I listened in to a bunch resting in a sunken road, and it seemed that they just thought there had been a raid on a bit farther south.

"Our orders were to work along the railway towards Douai, and to destroy it wherever we

[1] *Behind the German Lines*, by Captain J. E. Attleby.

found it in working order. We saw no signs of activity till Plouvain Halte, which had been made into an advanced railhead. Up to this point we had not had to fire a shot, and had managed to avoid observation. We halted for a few minutes to consider the position. We had intended to attack the line farther east, but this seemed too good an opportunity to miss. Anyway, we knew that Captain Attleby and a crowd of fellows were operating farther east. There was a big collection of transport in the station yard. We climbed unobserved on to the roof of a goods wagon, and opened with a hundred rounds rapid each. There was a regular stampede. The place was one big confusion ; horses bolting and kicking, men rushing all over the show. I don't know what damage we did, but we were shooting at point-blank range. Then, while the others kept up the firing and made a hell of a racket, I slipped down and began to explore. My luck was in, for the first thing I picked up was a Bosche overcoat. I slipped it on, and nobody took a bit of notice of me—they were all too busy getting away. They were properly rattled. Some of them were hiding under the trucks : nobody looked like doing anything. I found a big S.A. ammunition dump alongside the Gavrelle Road, just outside the station. I borrowed a tin of petrol from a lorry, and started the dump going. I hopped away quick, as I knew the other two would

open fire so as to prevent anybody putting the fire out. Ten minutes later the dump began to go off like a thousand machine-guns. As Jerry was now coming up in all directions, we judged it time to get clear. We slipped down the line, then doubled back to the Gavrelle Road. There we found the lorry. Gossett and Taylor hid inside, and I drove it on. We passed sentries in Gavrelle and at points along the Douai road, but I answered their challenge and was not stopped. It seemed to me, however, that there would be a general alarm all along the Douai line, so I suggested to Gossett that we turned north to the main Douai—Lens line. A bridge was marked at Quiéry, so we made for this, leaving the lorry outside the village. The place was very quiet, but we found a small dump of ammunition in the station yard. We strangled the guard quietly and then began to carry a dozen 77-mm. shells down to the brook. We emptied these, and made up charge Number 7, which we placed in position under the bridge. We then waited for a train to come along ; we had to work with a slow fuse, so it was rather difficult to estimate the exact time. As it happened, two trains came along together—an ammunition train from Douai and an empty from Lens. The empty got over a few seconds before the bridge went up, but the other ran right into it. It was a hell of a mess. The empty train stopped when it heard the crash, so we ran

down the line, killed the guard, driver, and fireman, who were all Bosche, and started it off before folks began to roll up. Behind us we saw the wreckage of the ammo. train on fire, and things began to go up. After a mile or so we had to get rid of the train somehow, so we worked up a fair speed and then jumped off, leaving it to go on by itself. We guessed it would do some damage somewhere.[1]

"By this time we got a hint of dawn, so we found a half-ruined barn where we could hide for the day. We hardly spotted a soul for the whole of the day. We did not come out before midnight, as we had determined to make another night of it by having a go at the Douai—Seclin railway. But this time luck ran wrong. We were scouting along comfortably north, when near Courcelles we ran into an aerodrome. It just happened that we got caught in the flares, and an alarm was given. I suppose everybody was feeling on the nip, once the reports of the previous night got round. So we hopped off west, and struck a coal-mine. Here there was a transport camp, so we fired their petrol dump. The guard began to shoot, and one of the bullets accidentally hit poor old Gossett, who died at once. Taylor

[1] It did ! Gathering a speed to thirty or forty miles per hour, it collided with a crowded troop train at the great triangle junction just to the south of Douai. Over 400 casualties resulted, and the confusion was indescribable. Two members of the Company were actually near the spot when it happened.

and myself got clear. There was a single line railway running along here, but we could not find a suitable spot to do much damage. As a goods train came along, we jumped on to it. We passed through several mining villages, and dropped off at Billy-Montigny, where there was a large iron bridge over a road. There were a lot of civilians in the houses nearby, so we had to be careful not to attract attention. As we could not find any ammunition, however, all we could do was to pull up some rails, and hope for the best. While we were waiting, a lorry came along. We stopped it and strangled the driver, intending to use it to get clear. As it was full of ammunition, we altered our plans and set it on fire under the bridge. It blew up mightily, and, although the bridge did not come down, it was not made any stronger. If we didn't break it, we bent it !

" There was a scampering from all directions, and Taylor and I had to do a quick guy into a miner's cottage nearby. The people had been awakened by the noise, but they were very decent and intelligent, and agreed to hide us. Actually no search was made.

" Next night we decided that the place was a bit too hot to hold us, and, as Jerry seemed to have taken a general alarm, we lay low for three nights. We went south to Mericourt (where we managed to fire another petrol dump). The railway formed a big loop between here and Lens,

and the enclosed space was one mass of war material. We found another house to hide in in Mericourt, and went out for three consecutive nights trying to get at the dumps. Fortunately, it snowed heavily the third night and the guard relaxed. We killed one man quietly, and then soaked with petrol one of the biggest dumps of heavy ammunition I have ever seen. Then we lit up. Unfortunately, we did not get clear in time, and Taylor was killed outright and I got a nasty gash in the left arm. The French people looked after me very well : they told me that the explosion had completely destroyed the right loop of the railway. They even smuggled a local doctor in at nights to attend to me : the woman of the house was expecting a baby, so had a good excuse.

" As the place was still very hot, I did not see any chance of doing much business on my own. So I decided to make for our own lines. I set off one night about a week later. It was one of the best bits of scouting I ever did. I crawled about two miles on my tummy, but at last reached our lines in front of Lievin."

This unvarnished, unaffected story is fairly typical of the company. Nothing like their exploit had been known in the previous experience of warfare. Man seems to have been born with a destructive instinct : he destroys with greater vigour than he creates. Few of the

company failed to leave gigantic finger-marks behind the German lines. Some specialised on the destruction of guns, some of dumps, some of railways. One little group, seizing a German machine-gun, calmly mounted it a few hundred yards from the main Arras—Cambrai road, and in a glorious five minutes almost wiped out an unsuspecting battalion on the march. Another larger group surrounded a German hutment camp, overwhelmed the guard, and fired the huts simultaneously. Large numbers of Germans were entrapped in the flames.[1]

It is very difficult to form an accurate estimate of the total damage inflicted by the Free Company. Attleby, working most conservatively on substantiated evidence, claims :

8,000 casualties.

97 guns destroyed.

Several thousand tons of ammunition and war material destroyed.

Seven bridges completely destroyed ; three others badly damaged.

Railways otherwise interrupted at eight important points.

These are the minimum claims. As the evidence gradually filtered in, all but Duncan were amazed

[1] Certain critics have condemned the methods of the Iron troops as brutal : of course they were, but so is all war. There is no differentiation in degrees of brutality.

at the overwhelming success of his plan. I recalled his words—that two men with a machine-gun behind the German lines might be of more use than a whole battalion in the trenches. He had more than vindicated his opinion. The effects of the raid were far-reaching. The staffing of the German lines of communication was immediately reorganised—far more troops being employed. The equivalent of at least two extra divisions of troops was used for this purpose. The reaction on the German morale was considerable : as Duncan had said, the best troops in the world will not stand up to a night attack—from the rear ! The immediate effect was exactly what Duncan had anticipated : every reader will readily recall that, while the German attack fell with crushing force at Verdun, the projected blow on the British line at Arras was never delivered.

Even more important perhaps—its influence upon the British Army was electric. The failure at Loos had been a dismal blow : here was a tonic of a most unexpected and invigorating type. From all parts of the front—nay, from all parts of the world—came thousands of applications to join this force which treated danger and death so cursorily, but which did surprising things. Private soldiers broke all military rules, regulations, and traditions in their efforts to get into touch with us. Of even greater moment, higher officers had

the first semi-defined inkling that the whole theory of war must be worked out afresh—that the old text-books must be scrapped and re-written. All previous tactics considered first the safety of your own army. You must protect its flanks and its rear before you thought of advancing. Yet here was a man who would deliberately throw a force into enemy country without even a hope that it would return. The very idea, too, of passing an enemy's position without actually capturing them —this, again, was somewhat too novel for the cautious Generals of the pre-war school.

But Duncan's prestige, of course, mounted by thousands per cent. Quite apart from the initial success and the subsequent exploits of the Free Company, he had handled the retirement of the brigade with consummate skill. Before dawn we were back in our own lines, together with some 1,500 prisoners we had mopped up in the process.

Sir John Douglas visited us the following day. By this time we had plenty of evidence—from prisoners, aeroplane reconnaissances, etc.—that Attleby's men were succeeding wonderfully well. It struck me that there was a change in Sir John's manner. Previously he had been very cordial, but now he was more serious. It seemed to me as if he now addressed Duncan as an equal—or even more. I left the two alone, and met Fermery outside.

" Sir John's here," I said.

"Of course," he grinned. Then he gave me a dig in the ribs that nearly sent me sprawling. "Bet you he's come to tell Duncan he's Major-General. D'you remember what I told you before?"

Fermery was either a good prophet or knew something. At dinner that night Duncan said:

"We must get busy at once, choosing and training more men. To-morrow the Iron Brigade becomes the Iron Division."

CHAPTER IV

The scene was a strange one. Nearly thirty men were present. The principal Staff Officers of the division, the Brigadiers, and Regimental Commanders were sitting round a cheap camp-table. Fermery was now Brigadier commanding the original brigade, and looked strangely unfamiliar in his red tabs (the days of his whiskers seemed already far away !). I, too, had been promoted to Major, and was designated to remain with Duncan as his D.A.Q.M.G.[1] At the moment, however, I was with Fermery as Brigade Major in place of Liberty, who temporarily commanded one of the new battalions.

Duncan had summoned us to meet him, and we knew that he had something important to say. For a month he had been training the two new brigades with such feverish energy that we knew he must have some special project in mind. Luckily, we had magnificent material to work on, for we had taken—so far as was humanly possible in such a limited space of time—the pick of the British Army. The romance of our short but remarkable history attracted all kinds of men to our

[1] Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General.

ranks. But such an attraction was not enough : any glamour would fade under the stern and superhuman demands that Duncan made of his men. But no man who had passed through Duncan's hands failed to respond, for his personal magnetism gave an added cheeriness to the absolute confidence we had in him.

I wish I had the psychological skill to analyse and the artistic skill to describe that group of men. I doubt if any council of war ever produced its like. There was Fermery, the instinctive man of action ; Trumper, who had an utterly logical reason for everything he did ; Minton, a naval officer from the *Naiad*, but one of the most practical soldiers in the division ; Greville, not yet twenty-six, but commanding a battalion—Duncan himself had selected him, with a sure insight that was richly rewarded ; Worton Spender, beaming energy from every bump of his forehead. Youth was strongly represented. Not a man was over forty. In the gay chaffing that preceded the conference there was a definite background of practical confidence.

As I looked round this group of men, so calm and forceful, each an outstanding personality, I realised that the man who could command their unqualified respect and unquestioned obedience must indeed be a leader of men. Yet the moment Duncan entered it was obvious that he was that man. Instinctively we turned to him as if for

guidance. He greeted us all, sat down, and began to speak. Our ears protruded.

"You will, of course, have guessed that I had an object in view in pressing forward the training of the division at such a precipitous rate. We can, I think, be well satisfied with our efforts. We have now a division, fully up to strength in infantry, though without artillery, which we shall borrow as required. Although we will not claim that every man individually is as perfect a soldier as we might wish, we can certainly say that there is no body of troops engaged in this war that can be classed even in the same category as ours. We can enter into any adventure with the most complete confidence.

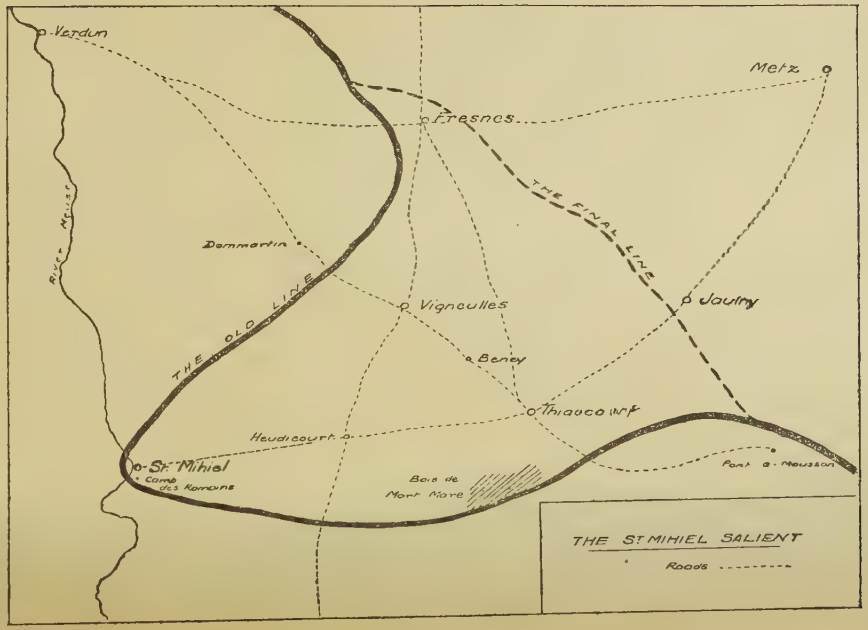
"Now I want to glance at the military position on this front. The principal point of interest is, of course, Verdun. Here the French are sustaining a continuous assault. So far they have been comparatively successful, but the strain is intense. Particularly the strain upon their communications is too great. Remember that point. Think of the 'Sacred Way'!

"At the opening of the offensive against Verdun, the danger of a similar thrust against our own lines being averted by methods of which you know, Sir John Douglas offered to the French Commander-in-Chief any possible assistance. General Rolfe's reply was a real French mixture of sentiment and common sense. The sentiment

was found in the expression that the French would dearly love to hold Verdun by their own efforts : the common sense in a request for us to relieve French divisions by taking over more line. This has been done.

" So far, so good. But the action, instead of being the matter of a few days, according to previous custom, has already lasted more than three weeks—and shows not the slightest sign of abating. On the contrary. The French are fighting remarkably well. Give a Frenchman a good sentimental idea to fight for, and he is one of the best soldiers in the world. But look at this map. Of the three railway lines entering Verdun from the west, two are cut by the enemy. The strain on the other is intolerable. Exactly the same remark applies to the roads. I can tell you confidentially that the situation at Verdun is now serious. The morale of the troops is excellent, but the question of supplies is critical.

" I see you are all gazing at the St. Mihiel salient. You instinctively choose the key to the situation. There, in the war of positions that opened the struggle, the Germans established a small bridgehead. Subsequent attacks have failed to dislodge them. Could St. Mihiel be cleared—and by cleared I mean, of course, could the enemy be pushed back several miles at that point—it is obvious that the main Nancy—Verdun railway and roads would afford great and instant relief.


Verdun
Metz
Fresnes
THE FINAL LINE
Dommartin
Vigneulles
Jouiry
THE OLD LINE
Beney
Thiaucourt
Heudicourt
St Mihiel
Camb. des Romains
Bois de Mort Mare
Pont a Mousson
THE ST MIHIEL SALIENT
Roads

"Everyone knows this, naturally. But the French are very fully occupied, and are in no state to undertake an offensive. So far as we are concerned, the position is difficult. We should have to build up a considerable army isolated from our main body—an enormous task. Further, a major operation might seriously interfere with our own great offensive which, as you know, is being planned for the summer.

"These are the points that have been considered by the Allied commanders. True, their considerations are based upon experience of normal and accepted conditions and methods of warfare. I have, however, suggested an alternative that is not normal, but which was yesterday accepted. Should it fail in its main object, it will at least make a temporary diversion, and we cannot lose more than a few thousand men. I am glad to say, however, that Sir John Douglas has such confidence in me and in you, he thinks we shall succeed. The division, therefore, will attack the salient by itself—and by its own methods.

"Look again at the map. There are two keys to the position—Thiaucourt and Vigneulles. These control every entrance and exit. The Germans have always been nervous about the salient, and there are no great stores accumulated in it. I believe that if we could hold these two villages for a week—ignoring the gaps—that the enemy would be forced to evacuate the salient.

" Sooner than that. In the complete arc there are at the moment but six weak divisions in line and two in reserve. Five of the eight have been badly battered at Verdun. How long would these remain in position, do you think, when they knew that a considerable enemy force was in their rear ? Particularly when they knew that that force was the Iron Brigade !

" Up north we have seen what a single company can do when placed behind the German lines. Now we will try the same experiment on a larger scale—with two brigades, in fact. Fermery, Thiaucourt is your prey : Maplethorpe, Vigneulles is yours. I believe we shall succeed. I know we shall succeed. To-morrow we entrain. Before then you will explain the whole plan to your officers. They will do the same to the men on the train journey. You will take back with you ample supplies of maps, together with models of the terrain. We shall attack almost immediately on arrival. And so, if you will follow me very carefully, I will now run through the details of the attack——"

Four nights later my head was throbbing with excitement. What a stroke of luck that I was still Fermery's Brigade Major, otherwise I must have remained behind with Duncan. All our plans had worked smoothly. Even the French troops in the area were not told of our attack until its eve. Surprise was always one of Duncan's essential

conditions. Here everything was favourable. Like their enemies, the French divisions holding the line had been ground in the Verdun mill, and no attack could be expected from them.

As Duncan had arranged, we were to attack Thiaucourt, while the Colonial Brigade[1] took Vigneulles. Our own scheme was fully worked out. Preceded by our line of skirmishers, we were to attack and cross the German lines at the point where they ran along the southern flanks of the Bois de Mort-Mare. A rapid advance of three kilometres through the wood would give us Hill 261. Here the brigade was to re-form for the final attack on Thiaucourt.

The moon was due to rise at 2 a.m., but a ground fog favoured our purpose. The whole brigade crowded into less than a mile of the French front line. With Fermery I passed along the whole line. I can honestly say that never in all my experience have I seen such troops. Here was little sign of the hesitant fear that attacks even the bravest of men on the eve of an offensive.

[1] The second brigade was composed entirely of Colonial troops. At the onset there had been some difficulty in its formation, since the Colonial Governments, legitimately, wished their men to fight as a complete force. But the overwhelming number of applications received by us caused them to modify this attitude. I need hardly say that this Colonial Brigade was of an exceedingly high standard. Comprising as it did the very pick of the already magnificent Colonial divisions, it was no whit inferior to the original Iron Brigade. Its only trouble, in its infancy, was the over-keen rivalry between the Canadian and Australian units included in it. But Duncan's intuition eventually guided this into channels of utility.

There was an air of excitement, of course, but of a determined confidence. At 11 p.m. over a hundred picked men silently left our lines. They carried no rifles, for their work had to be done in silence. My heart came to my mouth as the German flares periodically illuminated stretches of No-Man's-Land. But every one of our scouts positioned himself instinctively and wonderfully. In three minutes I guessed that they were cutting through the enemy wire. I gazed with projecting eyes through the darkness. What was happening? I could hear no sounds—could see nothing. Shots, and then silence : shots, and then silence again. The German flares ceased to search the ground : this was a good sign. I could see the men near me peering out with a great expectancy. Then a flare flashed into the misty night : another—another—another—another ! That was the signal. So our first blow was safely driven home.

Without a word of command a complete company of men passed over the parapet. Their object was to precede the main body in the advance on the second German line. Five minutes we gave them. Not a second more could we allow, for the general alarm might be given at any moment. And then the whole brigade moved forward. It would have been a magnificent sight, but fortunately the mist prevented it from being seen, or the German gunners would have reaped a rich harvest. Nearly 4,000 men, in the drabbest

khaki, moving silently into the unknown ! Behind them a battalion in horizon blue—a picked French force, which was to occupy the German line at least till dawn, mop up the dugouts, and enfilade the neighbouring trenches with machine-gun fire.

Fermery's huge bulk moved before me : he was an excellent guide—in the mist he seemed magnified to elephantine size. He walked easily over the shell-broken ground. Without great difficulty we passed through the approximately cut wire, and then—a thrill ! I stepped over the German front line. It was unique. Twice before I had taken part in frontal attacks—but this ! Walking behind the German lines, with none to say me nay. What would they say at home ?

But this was no time for dreaming. Before I had gone ten yards I heard a shout, a shot, and then a commotion. A German officer had emerged from his dug-out to make his rounds. He had raised a shout one second before our scout killed him. But the alarm was given. Doubtless the telephone bells were already tingling behind the German lines. I heard hoarse commands in French, and heard the battalion rush forward to do its work. A minute later a fierce but harmless barrage fell on the deserted French lines. Just behind me I heard confused sounds : the clash of steel, dull revolver shots, the sullen pop of hand grenades flung down into crowded dugouts. But :

"Come on," said Fermery, "things are going well. They'll think it's just a raid. We'll get along while they're dealing with it."

In front of us was complete silence, broken only by the snapping of undergrowth—for this wood was still a wood, the trees being no more than decimated by bombardment. Yet for nearly a mile I did not see a single German. Then we heard ominous sounds. Our advance company was heavily engaged. Instinctively every man pressed forward. We knew that the German second line lay only a few hundred yards ahead. Almost at once we came under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. Its aim, in the misty darkness, was necessarily casual, but here and there men began to fall. I heard three blasts from Fermery's whistle—the charge. Through the black night we rushed in one irresistible mass : in daylight we would have been mown down. Through a too orderly line of wire we scrambled : then murder. The German supports, hastily awakened from sleep by their sentries, were in no condition to meet our onslaught. I hesitated to kill my man, so scared seemed his rolling eyes in the darkness. Yet prisoners were impossible, and a live German behind us a danger. And immediately, as it seemed, a long blast from Fermery's whistle, ordering us on. The slope of the hill became steeper. We were now well in the region of the German field-guns. Their crews were too easy

prey. They had no time to scatter, and battery after battery was annihilated in a matter of seconds. On—up the hill—five minutes, ten minutes. Here is a tiny sunken road. There is a great roar almost at my feet. A battery of heavies. With a dozen others I drop down among them. The gunners stare in amazement. I see their gaping mouths by the light of their own lanterns. My revolver talks—one, two, three, four, five, six. I see my men preparing to explode a shell in the gun-barrels. Then—on—on—at once—on. It is only a kilometre now to the top of the hill. Only a kilometre. That isn't far. Five eighths of a mile. I used to do the mile under five minutes. Five eighths of five—but not at night—on—on—run. I have lost Fermery in the wood, but if I keep going up I shall find him—he will be at the summit. Am I not nearly there—five eighths of five—what's that? Two blasts—the signal to reform for the final attack. I must find Fermery. He may want me. Where's the summit. Ah? I am clear of the wood—that's sudden. Now visualise—visualise that map! Yes, I must be within a few yards of the top—that's where the wood broke. Bear right. Yes, here I am. And here's Fermery.

"Everything's going strong," he said, grinning all along his extensive mouth. "Casualties not too high, I think; plenty of damage done already, and, what's more, we're here. Question one, does Fritz know we're here?

"I doubt it," I said. I still retained visions of those staring, surprised gunners.

"So do I. Which thus disposes of question number two: How to attack. At once. Ten minutes for the brigade to get into position. Then, at 'em. So get busy; detail a small party to hold this height as long as possible: it's useful. Collard knows that his company scatters into raiding groups due west of here—that is, due south of Thiaucourt. Myer does the same to the north. You, Newman, when we get to Thiaucourt, make straight for the Divisional H.Q. in the little château there. Do what you like with the staff, but take Hayser with you—he talks nearer to real German than you. If it's not too late, let him collar the telephone and explain to Army H.Q. that it's only a raid. But if he can find out enough details, let him 'phone to all the units he can get into touch with to retire. Ten minutes up. Come on."

Again a shrill blast. Down the hill we go—much quicker, for this is open country. There seems to be thousands of us—surely plenty for the job. Not more than a mile. Are we going through without opposition! (I say, this is a real surprise attack, if you like! Do you realise that we have hardly been under gunfire since we started?) I see lights—Thiaucourt! Thiaucourt, the ductal gland of the salient! We shall cut it. Come on, Hayser, work across our rear to the north—that's

where the château is. Run. Yes, plenty of spirit left in us yet. Listen—now they're at it. Our first wave has struck the Bosche camp outside the village. There'll be murder there. Come on. This way, you chaps. Here's the château. Surround it—there are lights in it. Yes, you can shoot—we haven't quite surprised them. Over with that guard—in we go—come on, Hayser. Here's a bunch. Going to fight? Hands up, then. Hold them, boy. (God knows what we'll do with them.) Here you are, Hayser; here's the 'phones. One ringing now. Get busy. Golly, that's good. Ordering brigade to retire at dawn on to Hill 261. That bunch I left there will mow them down. Who's this guy you've found? What a taste in pyjamas! Eh? Yes, but keep your hands up if you want to talk to me. What? The divisional commander! Er—very pleased to meet you. Stand in that corner with the others for the moment, will you?

House all clear, boys? Right. Lock this bunch up in a cellar, then garrison the place. What a racket. House-to-house fighting, sounds like. Wait, keep a few officers back. Questions. Bring 'em in this room one at a time. Oh, you won't talk. Who's in the village? How many troops? Won't tell. All right, down to the cellar. Scanned through those papers yet, Hayser? Good! Rank—lieutenant. Good! I see that 342nd Regiment is quartered in the village. Not very strong, is it?

Less than 1,000. I thought so. Badly knocked about at Verdun. Morale not good, eh? I thought so. Reserve division at Chambley is only Landwehr, isn't it ? I thought so. Well, you'd better get down to the cellar : you'll be safer there.

Fermery came in a moment later. The man's calm was amazing. I had thought that I myself was doing well—but I was controlling myself : Fermery was natural. He reported that the eastern half of the village was ours : hand-to-hand and house-to-house fighting was in progress. The Germans were rattled, and were putting up a comparatively poor show. Our chaps were in fine form. The place was in utter confusion, of course, but things would sort out. The great thing was to get dug in before dawn. Worton Spender's battalion was already entrenching itself on the southern outskirts of the village. Fermery wanted to establish an outpost at Beney, so as to command the cross-road there.

Half an hour afterwards Baldicott arrived to report that the village was clear. He said that the Germans had fought very woodenly. Fortunately they had fought, which had enabled him to kill them. He did not know what we could do with prisoners. I thought ruefully of my cellar-full ! Suppose we had to stand a prolonged siege !

Baldicott dashed off again. We *must* get well dug in before the dawn, for we were bound to get artillery attacks. Infantry attacks we would laugh

at, but no troops can stand a heavy bombardment without cover of some kind. Fortunately, it would take the Bosche some time to find out exactly where we were. And the detached groups of our Free Companies, too, would make their presence felt.

And I must get busy. Quickly, a rough idea of all the supplies in the village. Come with me, you fellows. Good ! S.A.A.[1]—plenty of it. Thomson, get a bunch of prisoners and have it carted underground somewhere. Too exposed here. The moon seems to have cleared the mist. What time is it ? Four a.m. What's this ? Ration dump—excellent. Not very big. Divisional reserves, I suppose. Golly, luck ! Machine-guns ! These chaps must have fought. Square littered with dead bodies. Lights inside church. Temporary hospital. There's Templeton. Hullo, old man. What ? Fully equipped field-ambulance in a field a hundred yards west—German doctors still working it ! Excellent. Casualties ? Not so heavy as might have been expected, but plenty to deal with, under the difficult circumstances.

Back to the château. Got the portable wireless fixed up yet ? Good ! Anything through. What ? what ? Maplethorpe reported in Vigneulles.

[1] Small Arms Ammunition. I should have mentioned much earlier, perhaps, that Duncan solved the question of ammunition supply to Free Companies by arming them with German rifles (captured). Thus they could help themselves to ammunition as available.

Glorious ! Here's Fermery. I say, we've got Vigneulles ! (Even that doesn't make him excited : he seems to have expected it !)

" Get a message drafted, and we'll send it off by pigeon," he said. " Report to Duncan that we advanced as arranged, and have occupied Thiaucourt completely. We are entrenching, and have planted a company at Beney. Report as to supplies you have found. Our casualties, guessed, about five or six hundred. Guess, too, that we can hold the place for a week against all comers. Tell the French to hold off artillery fire for an area of a good mile round Thiaucourt unless we ask for it, or they may interfere with our free patrols. Tell them 341st Regiment is probably retiring from the Regnieville front. If the French could attack there and make a good bulge, it would ease the whole situation. Ask if he wants me to try and establish contact with Maplethorpe. And ask him what the blue hell we are to do with the bunch of prisoners we have taken. Got all that ? Good ! Let's get it away quickly."

Through the grey hours of the dawn I worked as I have never worked before. With a platoon of men and some hand-trucks, I carted supplies of ammunition and rations to the outskirts of the village. In all I established six small dumps, from which the units might draw as required. The cheerfulness was electric. Every face wore a broad grin. For an hour not a shot had been fired.

Evidently the German command had not the faintest notion about what was happening. (I tried to think, what would we have done in similar circumstances, but I could not visualise the confusion.) So far not a single shell had fallen in Thiaucourt. Doubtless at dawn——

But no. The daylight hours passed, and not a sign. It seemed as if the Germans simply could not believe the news, which they must have heard by now. Indeed, during the morning a supply train rolled into the station. The face of the driver, when he found a dozen grinning khaki figures waiting to receive him, is beyond description.

About midday we heard a sharp rattle of rifle-fire to the south. Evidently our outposts were in action. They must have done their work well, for the attack—if such it were—never developed. By this time we had completely taken stock of ourselves. The men had sorted themselves out into the formation which had been previously allotted, and the confusion of the night was ended. A rough circle of trenches surrounded the village, and a series of outposts connected us with the outlying company at Beney. Worton Spender was in high glee, for he had discovered two batteries of heavies on his front. Of machine-guns and ammunition we had plenty, and throughout the day we were arranging and constructing suitable mountings. The day's grace was exactly what we needed, and we used it to the utmost advantage. I would not

have believed that human beings could have worked as ours did. Yet, when the attack did come, they seemed as fresh as after a sleep.

It was nearly four o'clock when the action really started. An hour before, a runner had come in from Collard's company to say that large bodies of troops were marching on Jaulny and appeared to be deploying there. He would harry them hard, but, in view of their enormous numbers (he estimated ten or eleven battalions), it was improbable that he would succeed in breaking up the attack.

And ten minutes later the bombardment started. Our fellows greeted it with cheers and jeers. It was heavy, but futile. The Germans had made no reconnaissances—our patrols had seen to that—and did not know exactly where we were. (The only aeroplane to approach us during the day had been shot down by one of a series of guardian French machines which circled continually over us.) The artillery fire, therefore, concentrated on the village itself. This was just what we had anticipated, and all our men were on the outskirts.

The infantry attack, to me, was incredible. Accustomed as I was to trench warfare, with the sight of a living German perhaps once a month, I could hardly believe my eyes. I had heard stories of " massed formation " in the early days of the war, but had never fully comprehended what the term really implied. Yet here was the

real thing. Shoulder to shoulder, rank after rank, the grey infantry advanced. Down the slope to the north and west of the village—thousands of men in a narrow space.

No orders were given, for none were needed. The Bosche did not know where our fighting position was, for we had done no wiring. We waited. During the artillery preparation I had taken out a company of men and eight machine-guns about 400 yards away from the village, on the northern slope of Hill 215. Fermery had ordered the move. and his instinctive judgment was sound. I was fixed on the flank of the attack.

On, on, they came. Grey masses in steady lines. Hundreds—thousands of them. Dead silence from the village—a disconcerting silence. Evidently causing some uneasy moments to the German command, for less than half a mile from the village the advance halted. Had we disappeared? Had we evacuated the village? Scouts began to move forward. Wait! Wait! None of my men attempted to fire—we did not want to betray our position. Then—crack—crack—along the line. Not an outburst of musketry—just a few individual shots. But no scout was missed.

Yet in this lay a sign to the Germans, surely. No troops in the world could be restrained from firing at such a target, they must have argued—the casual firing must indicate a weakly held line. So—forward. Again the steam-roller moved. We

peered eagerly from the ditch in which we were positioned. Fermery was leaving it late. Ah !

At point-blank range, over open sights, our two battalions opened fire. It was the signal. On a two-mile front the crackle of a rifle and machine-gun fire. The first German line simply withered away. It was uncanny. My own men were straining at the leash, but not a shot did we fire. Our time had not yet come. The second German line moved forward. Now they had some information to work on. They knew we were in strength, and knew approximately our position. This time their advance was more cautious : the men advanced in groups, taking advantage of any available cover. Then I saw two companies detach themselves, and move to the left. A flank attack. But here was my chance. One word and the ditch blazed fire. It was murder—blue murder. Not a single shot was fired at us, so sudden was our outburst. For two minutes only it lasted—then it was simply a question of clearing up casual stragglers.

It was half an hour before the next attack developed. It was preceded by a short bombardment, which was more effective than the last. Looking at the long line of German dead, I felt some admiration for those who were about to advance. Did they know in their hearts that they must fail ? It seemed to me as if the attack had already lost heart. Beneath what was probably the

most accurate rifle-fire in the history of warfare, the German line wavered : the survivors flung themselves to the ground : then, as khaki figures with flashing bayonets rushed towards them, they broke and ran. This time it was our turn to lie down. (It is a senseless thing to chase a fleeing man with a bayonet—it is much simpler to lie down or stand still and shoot him.) Across the flank of the retreat my advanced company worked havoc. And in the following dusk we moved back to the village, across scenes of carnage which I had never seen equalled. I hate to confess it, but I purposely lagged behind in order to be violently sick.

Fortunately, we spent a quiet night. Each man slept for a short space in turn. Yet I wasted my spell, tired as I was. Intoxicated by the mad adventure of the past twenty-four hours, I could not clear my mind. What would the morrow bring ? By then, surely, the German command would have realised the strength of the menace. Yes, they had.

At five o'clock a bombardment of incredible intensity fell on the village. Immediately our fellows scattered, outwards, for it was one of Duncan's maxims that it is always safer to advance against a barrage. In a cellar of the château, Fermery and I made our H.Q. From the periodical reports which reached us, it was evident that this was the real thing. For two hours shells of all sizes descended in multitudes. The village became an

utter ruin. Houses collapsed like ninepins under the impetus of high explosives. A hail of shrapnel peltered down continuously from above. Occasionally, in a second's interval from the iron orchestra, we could hear the treble notes of rifle-fire on all sides. Our outposts were engaging the advance : without doubt they were inflicting heavy casualties, but without doubt, too, they would be overwhelmed. Then, on the stroke of seven, the overture ceased, as if to the final beat of a conductor's baton. The attack proper had begun. Fermery and I went up above. The church tower nearby had escaped destruction : we raced up the rough wooden ladders.

The commander in a modern battle is usually at a great disadvantage in that he is necessarily placed many miles from the actual scene of conflict. Here we had reverted to earlier conditions. From our vantage-point we could see almost the whole of our positions. And what sights we saw. From north, south, and east the enemy came. It is always difficult to judge numbers in mass, but the advancing columns seemed endless. I was troubled, but Fermery was as unperturbed as ever.

" They'll get a shock in a minute," he chuckled. " They think we're still in our lines."

Sure enough, it was one of the minor details of Duncan's tactics that gave us our first advantage. As I have mentioned, his principle was that, if an

enemy bombards your line, it is better—should the nature of the ground permit—to advance rather than retire. If you advance, you escape his barrage : if you retire, his barrage follows you. Further, when the infantry attack follows, you are in a position to get in an unexpected blow.

This is precisely what happened. The Germans had by now succeeded in getting aeroplanes over our lines, and knew their position. But, in the bombardment, our fellows had moved an average of 200 yards outwards.

One of the most complete surprises in the world occurs when a man who is expecting a blow receives it a minute before he expects it. This was the unpleasant fate of the advancing wave. It was met by a point-blank fire just as it was forming for the final rush. Heavily as our men were outnumbered, they had every other advantage, and made the most of them. The attack broke in confusion, leaving a dreadful trail of loss behind it. In the confusion which followed, our fellows made their way back to the lines. So far, so good. But worse was to come.

After a second attack had been bloodily repulsed, the German commander, whoever he was,[1] evidently decided that a frontal attack was useless, in spite of his overwhelming force. For a further hour or more we experienced another furious

[1] I believe, General von Ernett, commanding the 21st Corps.

bombardment ; then the attack developed again. But this time it was concentrated on a single sector—the southern flank line, defended by Worton Spender's battalion. The enemy advanced in such density that the masses of yesterday appeared as scattered units in comparison. The havoc of our fire was indescribable : our few guns, firing over open sights, simply mowed bloody lanes. Yet such were the numbers that the advance continued under its own impetus. It says something for German courage and discipline that the men did not turn and run. On—and on—and on. Every yard men fell, but every yard was a yard nearer. In three minutes they would be—they must be—in our lines. And we could not afford to lose a yard.

" Quick," said Fermery, calm but unwontedly serious, " take the reserve company—get that trench back."

I almost fell down the grimy ladders : my whistle brought the men rushing up from every cellar in the village—they were waiting for the word. We dashed down the two streets to the south : there was no time for formation, but every man knew what was wanted. Without a word they raced like madmen to the scene of action—a scene that beggars description. It was like the rough-and-tumble scrap of an American film. In the battered trench, out of it, men struggled in mortal combat. Hardly a shot was fired—so close

was the fight that a bullet would be as dangerous to friend as to foe. No quarter was asked, none was given. Everything was viciously deadly. The clash of steel against steel, hoarse cries of anger and hatred, the silent rip of the bayonet entering a man's bowels, the sobbing cough of the man as he fell, the fierce eyes and snarling teeth—these were indelible impressions of the scene. We had reverted to the primitive state—bestial and ghastly.

The intervention of my company turned the scale. One man turned to run : he was allowed to go—and the spark spread as it always will. The line broke, and fled—where it could. The groups were so confused that many Germans were cut off from their lines. But one man raised his hands—and again the spark spread ; we had perforce to take them prisoners. Of those who retired, scarcely a man gained his fellows. With rare intuition, Worton Spender had foreseen the result of our charge, and hastily flung out his right company in front flank. This was the end : I got tired and sick of seeing the heavy bodies fall clumsily on the scrubby turf.

I left my company with Worton Spender, who needed it badly to replace his heavy losses. Then I conducted the prisoners back to the village and began to interrogate them. All was now quiet around us. Our men were working like fiends repairing our lines and bringing in the wounded.

Over to the west, however, we heard a great sound of firing—our outpost company was having its turn.[1]

We pumped an enormous amount of information out of the prisoners, who were bewildered and disquieted. I was preparing a lengthy despatch to Duncan, when I saw a French aeroplane above, flying exceedingly low. Then I was astonished to see that he meant to land. There was only one space available—the small open ground by the German field-ambulance. It was a wonderful feat, but it was done. Good ! Now we should have news from outside. The first arrival in a beleaguered city is the most welcome of friends.

We rushed across the ground towards the 'plane as the pilot climbed out : he left the engine running. He greeted us with excitement : we, him with no less. How were things going ? Good ! Good ! Vigneulles still holding ! Good ! Germans ready to retreat ? Perhaps. What ? Whole world stirred by our exploit ! Ah ! Despatches for

[1] Actually Beney was the scene of an epic conflict, and of the only German success of the day. The small British force—less than 200 men—was attacked by a complete German division. The carnage was dreadful. Our men fought from street to street and house to house. Yet it required four hours before the Germans finally cleared the hamlet. The rumour spread that, incensed by their immense losses, the Germans massacred the survivors. This story has, happily, been contradicted by some wounded men who were taken prisoners, and who returned to England after the Armistice. It appears that, as at Thiaucourt, our men fought absolutely to the death, disdaining every hope of quarter. Thus only a few badly wounded men remained alive in the place when the Germans finally carried it.

Fermery, with full details and information. Good ! What ? The Commandant Newman, if still alive, to return in the aeroplane. If not, some other officer fully conversant with the present situation.

I hastily arranged things with Fermery and prepared to leave. There was room for one more besides myself. It is not often that one takes prisoner a general of division, so I thought my pyjama'd friend might accompany me—in uniform, of course. Off we went. The take-off was difficult, but our pilot a crack. Five minutes—ten minutes—no time—and we were alighting at a French aerodrome.

Duncan was waiting there. Had we been Frenchmen we would have embraced a dozen times. My inclination was to chatter and show off my prisoner, but there was vital work to be done. One point in particular : after I had briefly sketched the position :

" We took about 400 prisoners. A queerly mixed lot."

" Ah ! " from Duncan.

" That's the strange thing I wanted to mention," I said. " These fellows were from——"

He cut me off.

" From the 97th, 128th, 138th, 247th, and 389th Regiments," he said. " Is that correct ? "

" How on earth did you know ? " I gasped.

" I just guessed, that's all."

"It shows, doesn't it, that Fritz is badly rattled, scratching together a mixed force like that."

"It shows far more than that," said Duncan. "For those five regiments formed the brigade in reserve of every division in the salient!"

"So that means——"

"It means that now is the time for the apex to be driven in. Come quickly. Let us get off in the car. My great difficulty has been to persuade the French that we have succeeded: they have refused to believe it. We can make them move now. Bring that aviator and your prisoner with you."

As we sped toward French Army Headquarters at Bar-le-Duc, Duncan explained the whole situation. For the whole morning he had been trying to persuade General Deboury to move. But Deboury had had no faith in the scheme from the start (I suppose that might be natural enough). If the English cared to throw away a couple of brigades on a ridiculous errand, let them. For him, he had to defend a long front with the divisions. That was quite enough.

We were shown into his presence straight away. There was a short talk with the French aviator, and a brief examination of old von Boumens. Then the real business began. I had half gathered from Duncan's complaint that he had been literally pleading with Deboury, almost on his knees. There was no trace of that now. Duncan was giving orders—and Deboury was taking

them ! I never saw a man change so much in ten minutes. There was a telephone conversation with French Headquarters at Chantilly, and another with Sir John Douglas at St. Omer. Duncan came away from the 'phone beaming. Then the principal officers of the French Army Staff were summoned. Duncan began to talk. He dictated orders like a man repeating a part in a play. Every detail was mentioned. For half an hour he went on. I sat enthralled. I began to see that bigger Duncan which the world knew later. Here was no mere executive officer controlling a single battalion, but an administrative genius ordering an attack by nearly a quarter of a million men. And he did it with the ease and confidence of an old hand. It was a revelation—and yet no surprise.

The orders were prepared, and Deboury signed them without comment. He seemed, now, to recognise that he was in the presence of a greater man—although he was not big enough to acknowledge it. But, at any rate, his co-operation was now assured—Chantilly would see to that. I foresaw great things for the morrow.

" I've had the hell of a time this last three days," Duncan confessed to me. " I hardly knew how to hold myself in. I've always been used to being in the thick of things myself. All the time I was aching to be with you. And this continual argument here got on my nerves. Never again.

In future I either command or obey. In warfare there is no room for persuasion. Had I had my own way, the salient would have disappeared to-day. However, there is to-morrow. I suppose I am lucky. Usually to-morrow is too late. This time it won't be. Let's get off. I've completed all arrangements here. I want to see Freyton before he goes into action."

It was a good two hours' drive round to the north of the salient. There, in front of Dommartin, our third brigade was eagerly waiting its chance. Elated beyond measure at the wonderful success of our comrades, all these men wanted to be in it too. Theirs had been the harder part, in a way. It is a great strain to serve by standing and waiting. But with the morrow's dawn their moment would come. The brigade was to be the apex of a new attack on Vigneulles—and this time secure flanks were to be formed.

I lay down to get my first precious hour of sleep. It was never so welcome. But at the desolate hour of two in the night I was awakened by the sound of thunder. Or so it seemed. For every gun on a front of thirty miles began to speak. I could imagine the feverish activity of the night, with thousands of men working like madmen to bring up the necessary supplies. (The French command, having committed itself, took no half measures. Stocks of ammunition were even diverted from the sacred Verdun to replenish the divisional and

corps reserves that were to be fired away in a single night.)

It was a symphony of death. The crackle of the seventy-fives sounded like a giant machine-gun : behind us a deeper boom speeded wider wings of death on their way. As Duncan and I rushed through the night, back to Deboury's headquarters, I almost felt sorry for those stricken Germans in that maze of forests. For them there was no retreat.

During the next few hours I experienced some of Duncan's earlier feeling. I, too, had been used to executive work on the spot : now I must wait while others did the work.

From time to time reports came in. From three sectors came the news that the French patrols had found the German trenches empty. Was the enemy, then, endeavouring to escape from the net? But no, Duncan said. His hold on St. Mihiel was too valuable to be lightly released. These withdrawals were local—probably scare retirements by badly rattled troops. By now every German soldier in the salient must know that he was almost cut off from his friends.

Five a.m. The firing seemed to increase in intensity. (These Frenchmen must have bigger reserves of ammunition on the spot than we have, I thought. We could never have staged an attack of this calibre at twelve hours' notice.) 5.20. 5.25. 5.30. The firing ceased. But only for a

moment. The gunners were increasing the range.

" They're off," said Duncan.

The attack had begun. General Deboury was now happier and more confident. Obviously it was no lack of courage or resolution that had made him so nervous earlier—probably because of that political interference that bade French generals conserve French lives at all costs—sometimes, even of victory. But even now Deboury waited on Duncan's opinion.

The attack was made in three parts. From the north and south, salients were to be driven in, to connect up with our two brigades. At the same time a hammer-blow was to be struck at the very nose of the salient—at St. Mihiel itself.

The first news came from the south. There the French attacking division had a good jumping-off ground, for it had already advanced its line nearly a kilometre when the unlucky German 341st Brigade, at Hayser's command, had made its disastrous retirement. Hill 261 was ours once more, so the message came. We were in sight of Thiaucourt ! Flares from the village ! Good ! Then Fermery and his crowd were still there. Press on, Frenchmen, press on !

Here's another message—from the extreme of the salient. " Left bank of Meuse cleared. Camp des Romains surrounded. Signs of general retirement." That's the stuff ! We must capture that

Camp at once—the hill commands a big territory.

And on the north—almost the most important of all to us, since our own third brigade was the spear-head of the attack. A broken wire meant that an anxious hour was to pass before we heard any news. I could not conceal my agitation : this idle waiting was unnerving. Duncan was now completely master of his feelings, as of the situation. With Deboury and his Chief-of-Staff he was working out the best position for the final line. A rough line from Fresnes to Pont-á-Mousson, I heard them discussing. The world would wake up with a shock to-morrow.

At last ! We are through ! The northern attack met with an unexpectedly strong resistance from a fresh German division. Once this had been overcome, however, the defence was visibly weakened, and we had reached Vigneulles.

Duncan turned to Deboury, smiling. " The final phase but one, now, I think," he said.

Deboury nodded, and took up the telephone. I heard him give the order for a general assault. Within fifteen minutes the mass of guns began to roar again. In the front lines thirty thousand figures in horizon blue were awaiting a signal. The St. Mihiel salient was about to disappear.

And, almost at the moment of that signal, Rolfe entered the 6th Army H.Q. I had never seen him, this Grand Old Man of the French Army. Duncan, I knew, had met him two or three

times during the past few weeks. I felt an unconscious thrill as I saw them together. The Old and the New. Experience and Youth. Rolfe moved towards Duncan : he paused but one moment to acknowledge his salute ; then he embraced him, with affectionate regard shining from his kindly old eyes. I heard the whisper, " Thou art a man !"

Duncan was unaffectedly glad to see Rolfe. Victory was assuredly ours, but its effects might be lost unless a firm hand remained in control. Assuredly vicious counter-attacks on the new line (wherever it was finally established) must be expected. The enemy would not lightly relinquish his hold on the Meuse communications, and by now he must have ample reserves at hand. The three—Rolfe, Duncan and Deboury—sat down to discuss ways and means. The shortening of the line, of course, would release many thousands of men ; I heard Rolfe mention three fresh divisions which were already entraining at Nancy. But my tired head had had almost enough. Logical thought had gone. I struggled to keep my mind alert, but my eyes would persist in closing.

He was standing by me when I woke up.

" Enjoyed that ? " he asked.

" What time is it ? " I said.

" Seven o'clock."

" Everything going well ? " I demanded. " Has the attack come off ? "

" It did—yesterday," said Duncan.

I stared.

"You've been to sleep. You fell over yesterday, and a couple of orderlies put you to bed. Never mind—you earned it. And everything's going well. The salient is flattened out. We have got about 32,000 prisoners, hundreds of guns, and an enormous lot of oddments. An approximate line has been established: there is plenty of local fighting going on. Later there will be grand attacks, but it will hold. The French are in force."

"And our chaps?" I gasped.

"All three brigades have been successfully withdrawn during the night. We are just going to see them now."

I jumped out of the camp-bed in one bound. The crisp morning air thoroughly awakened me as the car rushed along. As we journeyed, Duncan gave me more details of the final advance.[1] Never since Cromwell's day had there been a more crowning victory.

With a thrill we crossed the old German lines near Apremont: there was a bumpy passage of a mile or two, where the road had been hastily repaired. Everywhere we encountered French patrols, for scattered parties of

[1] I have given no details of the general action around the salient, as it is fully described elsewhere. The most authentic account is given, of course, in Marshal Rolfe's despatches—in which he generously gives Duncan the fullest credit. A more graphic, though, I believe, still accurate description, is contained in Poillot's classic, *Les Batailles de Lorraine.*

Germans were still being rounded up. At Heudicourt a large German camp existed : here, I learned, our division was being concentrated.

Shall I ever forget the scene ? The two brigades from Vigneulles had arrived only half an hour before us. The tiny village square was a mass of men ; columns of smoke betokened field-cookers : our men were having their first real meal for five days. I glanced over the crowd—unkempt, unshaven, but with the joy of victory in their eyes. We stopped the car on the outskirts ; a man stared at us, rubbed his eyes, and jumped to his feet. I heard a stentorian yell : " Here's the boss ! " and the whole square seemed to move. There was one mighty rush towards us, officers and men intermingled. Then a cheer of such fierce exuberance as I had never heard. Five thousand men forgot their weariness and their hurts in the presence of the man who inspired them all. It was a scene of the wildest enthusiasm that I had ever witnessed. Those first few hours out of action are usually an agony of depression and dullness. Here were men inoculated with a wonderful fire. The atmosphere was infectious. Even Duncan was affected by his great welcome. Eventually he climbed on to the top of a field-cooker : his presence gave dignity even to this incongruous platform.

" My boys," he began—and there was a real

paternal ring in his words—" my boys, you have done very well. I gave you a big job to do, but I knew you would do it well. It does not affect our ideas at all, but you may be interested to know that the whole world is ringing with your story. Your comrades and allies marvel : your enemies marvel still more. That is just as it should be. You all know my ambition—to raise a force of men the like of which has never been seen in the history of the world. I believe I have succeeded. And now, feed and sleep. While you do that, I will think out the next job for you."

There was a fresh outburst of tremendous cheers. I was as if intoxicated. Only now, so it seemed, did I know the spirit of our men. And then, down the narrow agricultural lane there came a steady tramp of feet. I shouted to Duncan—here was the brigade from Thiaucourt. Almost in silence the battalions trooped into the square : every eye turned on them—for everyone knew that these men had borne the fiercest heat of the attack. Sadly depleted they were, of course. Not a battalion could count half its strength. Some companies had entirely disappeared.

And then they saw Duncan. He walked forward, taking Fermery by the hand, and half placing his left hand round his shoulder. The moment was electrical. A frenzied outburst of

cheering shattered the silence. Duncan passed slowly down the ranks, till a giant negro fell on his knees, grasping Duncan round the legs, and sobbing with unrepressed emotional excitement. Duncan raised him as gently as a mother her sleeping child. I am not sentimental, but I had to fight hard to keep my own eyes from filling.

But soon we got them all into camp, and next day to the railhead. A month by the sea at Treport-Mers—that was the programme. Not for the sake of the men, for they were ready for action at any time. But we must replenish our depleted ranks.[1] In this our difficulty was one of selection, for we had an enormous range of magnificent material from which to choose. Our intensive training began almost at once, for Duncan's frequent absences betokened that something big was afoot. It was the middle of May 1916 before we entered the line again. I shall never forget our march to the front. It was like a triumphal procession. Civilians and troops alike came out to stare and cheer, amid unprecedented scenes. The dignity of St. Omer

[1] The total casualties of the division during the operation were 5,121, of which nearly a thousand were lightly wounded men who subsequently rejoined us. Actually, the operation was one of the cheapest—comparatively—of the whole war. The French casualties in the final close-up and the subsequent fighting to establish the new line were about 17,000. But over 35,000 Germans were captured, quite apart from very large losses in killed and wounded. In considering these figures, it should be remembered that up to this point the losses of attackers had invariably exceeded those of the defenders.

fell to the ground as we passed through it. The division had a personality of its own, and its power had stirred the imagination of the most sluggish mind. As we marched past Sir John Douglas near St. Omer, I saw the members of his entourage gaze at us and then look at one another. Yes, the New Idea had arrived.

CHAPTER V

Worton Spender came in to dinner one night.

"Do you know this man Remington?" Duncan asked him.

"What—*The Times* military correspondent? Rather!"

"Is he safe?"

"Absolutely, I think," Spender said. "A very sound man altogether."

"I want to meet him. You might arrange it." And with that Duncan changed the subject.

I had never before met Colonel Remington. We spent a pleasant hour together over lunch. Then Duncan had him to himself for the rest of the afternoon. I had no clue as to what transpired between them.

But a few days later I showed an article to Duncan.

"Have you seen this?" I asked. "Here's Remington in *The Times* throwing a hint about landing a force behind the Turks in Palestine. At least, that's obviously what he's getting at, though he words everything very cleverly—just enough to dodge the censor, I suppose. Do you think it's a feasible thing?"

Duncan returned no answer. I stared: he stared me out, smiling. So that was it!

That evening Worton Spender came rushing round. So he had seen *The Times* too.

"You're wide, sir, very wide," he said admiringly to Duncan. "This is very well done. But you might have let me into it. I still have plenty of influence at home, you know."

Duncan immediately became serious.

"You ought to know me better than that, Spender," he said. "I am not a political carpet-bag general, touting in my own interests. Don't you see that you politicians are ruining the war as well as running it? The idea's all wrong. Why doesn't the Cabinet give its complete confidence to the men it chooses? Why does it allow its choice to be influenced by back-door methods? What happens? Somebody thinks out some scheme of attack. He gets hold of some member of the Cabinet—maybe unconcerned with the main direction of the war—and impresses him with its importance. The Minister pushes it: it becomes a personal matter. There is a lot of discussion; by the time a decision is reached all the world knows all about it. Do you know that at the time of the attacks on Gallipoli the Turks got all their information—not from Egypt or other bases—but from London? Then they start wrangling over a commander. One big noise wants one man: another, another

—often on purely personal grounds. It's all wrong, all wrong. We have lost the finest element of warfare—surprise. How can you get surprise when a Cabinet of thirty or forty men discuss the essential details of an operation months before it takes place? Are *all* the secretaries and clerks inviolable? Do wives of Cabinet Ministers *never* talk? Do you expect to spring a surprise when the Prime Minister has to be awakened at six in the morning to hear the big mine go up? It's all wrong.

"Do we pick the right commanders for the jobs? Have you noticed that, of the six British generals holding Army or equivalent independent commands, four are old Etonians? I don't run down Eton, but isn't there a certain significance in this fact? Is the bogey of seniority really laid? Another point. You mentioned the other day that most of the brains of the nation were now in the Army! Quite right. But what have you done with them? Made them second-lieutenants, to be shot down by the hundred. Do you realise that of all these 'brains' only two have so far attained the very moderate rank of brigadier-general. I am the only one who has passed it.

"And when you give a man a job, why not let him do it? Did Fife have a real chance at the Dardanelles? Has Douglas got a real chance here? Answer me that. At the bottom of your

heart you know he has not. He is planning his summer offensive. The Cabinet loyally supports him, you say—adequate numbers of men, great reserves of guns and ammunition. So far so good. But what will happen? He will attack, he will advance; he will attack and advance again. The Cabinet will cheer, but one day someone will look at the casualty lists. Then they will drop a gentle hint to Douglas. That will finish it. He will try to be too careful. You cannot economise in lives. In avoiding casualties he will nibble instead of biting: in the end he will suffer far more. And the Cabinet, blaming him, will pat itself on the back for its 'whole-hearted support.'

"I don't say that England is unique in its mixture of politics and war. France is much worse, for that matter. But it won't do!"

Spender had been staring at him, with mouth wide open. Every word was full of meaning and absolutely straight from the shoulder. The atmosphere was tense. Yet the most dramatic moment was to come.

"Then what would you have?" Worton Spender asked him. He was obviously impressed.

"I would have a virtual dictatorship," said Duncan. "Were I the Cabinet, I would choose the man fitted for the job. Having chosen him, I would not support him—I would *obey* him."

Spender sat silent for some moments, staring straight before him.

"Yes, that's all right," he said, "that's all right if you could find a big enough man. That's it—a big enough man." A moment's pause. "And, by God, Duncan, you are that man!"

He jumped to his feet, and I with him. The atmosphere pulsated ecstatic waves. But Duncan motioned us to our seats.

"We must wait and see," he said. "And in the meantime—we must not think aloud."

No, but I did some quiet thinking within the next few hours. I have recorded this scene fairly fully because it makes a turning-point, I think, in Duncan's life. I knew by now that during the past few weeks he had been before the Cabinet on several occasions, and had seen the whole gamut of the political-military machinery. It was as if he had decided that such a system would never win the war. It was no personal ambition that prompted his thoughts. He had long known of his personal influence over men, but only during the latter part of the St. Mihiel operation had he really discovered, I believe, that he could also play the really big game of war, using men as pawns. Yet after that inspired remark of Spender's, the idea was never far away.

Events moved rapidly enough during the next few weeks. At the time I knew very little of what had happened during Duncan's visits to London,

but it was evident that they had been effective. The division, meanwhile, was in great form. The reinforcements were well up to our high standard, and were keen to prove their mettle. Our short spell in the line was useful in welding together new and old—and the unfortunate Germans opposite us learned again that even ordinary trench warfare was no sinecure when facing the Iron Division.

And then another hectic period of training. Yes, evidently Remington's article was inspired. On a quiet part of the coast of Brittany we practised embarkations from armoured launches. The excitement and enthusiasm throughout the division grew apace. Evidently a special job after our own hearts awaited us.

And yet another surprise! I mentioned one day to Duncan, sitting on a high cliff:

"I see that the Naval Division is to be disbanded—a great pity."

"Say, rather, that it *was* to have been disbanded," he said. "As it happened, I wanted another division for the enterprise I have in mind, so I asked for it and got it. That's where Fermery has gone now—to Doullens—to settle things up. I expect we shall keep about one brigade of the original personnel, and make up two more in the usual way—one, another Colonial one, I hope."

"So we are to continue to expand."

"Yes. The Cabinet has bitten the idea now. In fact, after the St. Mihiel affair, they could not refuse us anything. And it is like a British Cabinet, too : offer them something for nothing and they snap it up without going too deeply into bona fides. Fortunately for them, we are a genuine concern, so their gamble will probably come off. They have got so used to generals who promised them a victory and then omitted to deliver the goods, that a man who gets his victory first before asking for anything at all is a bit of a novelty to them."

"But did you ask for anything?" I queried.

"Yes," he replied, "I did. I don't like these methods, and one day I shall alter them all." (It will be seen that from this time Duncan definitely assumed that he was destined eventually to control our side of the war.) "They sent for me after St. Mihiel—both Rolfe and Douglas had been exceptionally decent and fair over the whole thing. After formal congratulations, they began to pump me about further schemes I had in mind. I mentioned one idea, and they jumped at it. It was a side-show, but even the Westerners agreed when I offered to ask for never a reinforcement. I wanted about 50,000 men, I said, plus naval backing and transport. I held out the plum and they bit it. If my scheme came off, I pointed out, the whole course of the war would be altered in one rapid stroke. If not—well, all

our side-shows have cost far more than 50,000 men. In any case, I promised definitely not to ask for another man. True, one Minister had the pluck to mention that every side-show general had promised that, but I just looked at him, and he shut up. Oh, yes, the Cabinet are behind me all right."

"And Douglas?"

"Ah, there came my only difficulty, since I was determined to be absolutely loyal to him. Naturally, he doesn't want a man taken from France before his offensive starts. I thought at first he would cut up rough, but he played the game. So did I, I think. I persuaded Khartner to let Douglas have four extra divisions—two from England, two from Salonika. So everybody is now satisfied. It has been rather a trying time. I don't like this wrangling. I told the Cabinet so. They sat dumb for nearly an hour while I gave them a lecture on secrecy and surprise. I think I gave them some new ideas—and certainly some shocks. But Cabinets are notoriously fickle. That is why I want to get a move on before this one changes its mind."

A few days later the issue of the *London Gazette* was almost a monopoly of the Iron Division. Duncan, of course, became lieutenant-general. Fermery took over the division, and I, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, went to the new Corps H.Q. I had no specific military office, but

was to act as a personal assistant to Duncan. This pleased me mightily. Our staff was a queer conglomeration. The ordinary executive officers of the Adjutant- and Quartermaster-General's departments were filled by purely military men—of our own type, of course. But in addition we had twenty or thirty men—a weird assortment—raked up by Duncan from all parts of the world, and given some military rank which fitted most of them incongruously. The purpose of some of them was not immediately obvious. That we should have four professors of psychology among us did not surprise me. But the others—possessing between them a marvellous range of information and experience on all kinds of unusual subjects—not till later did I see their meaning.

I need not go into detail about our special training—as I have said, a very full and complete description can be found elsewhere. But our preparation was never more detailed or exacting. In the course of it nearly 400 men were deleted from our ranks : some at the instance of the physical instructors, some by those psychologists, who asked strange questions at awkward moments. Duncan himself was on the spot continuously : the greatest difficulty lay in teaching the new men to move as easily by night as by day. Gradually it came, and those inland moors of Brittany saw some strange, shadowy figures moving about in the summer darkness.

We had with us now our first artillery—four brigades of howitzers—not a gun among them. To these, too, Duncan gave special attention, carefully supervising their training. I was amazed at his grasp of artillery principles, for he had had little practical experience.

So there came that midsummer day when a great fleet of transports sailed from the harbour of Marseilles. I knew how Duncan doted on secrecy, yet how this enormous convoy could be kept secret I did not know. But few men aboard bothered themselves about such questions. They had supreme confidence in themselves and in their leader. As he said, so they would do. That was enough.

Let me pass on for more than a week to a scene that was unforgettable. Picture the ward-room of a mighty battleship, crowded with men. There were present every commanding officer and every field officer of our corps ; all our corps and divisional staffs ; naval officers numbering twenty or more. Youth was very strongly represented. I suppose Fermery must have been the oldest man there. As Duncan entered, with Rear-Admiral Locke, every man rose to his feet with an expectant glow in his eyes. They had come to hear their battle orders. Everyone knew that the moment was at hand.

Duncan began to speak in the quiet but forceful tones we knew so well. And what a story he

told ! It fascinated me, to whom it was not entirely fresh. The others, not yet in the secret, listened with unaffected excitement.

" To make everything absolutely comprehensible, I must begin right at the beginning," he said. " Listen. After St. Mihiel I was invited by the Cabinet to submit some new scheme of attack. I forthwith suggested an attack on the Turk. I regarded it as of primary importance to knock the Turk completely out. Once let us get Constantinople, and the first stage of the war ends. The enormous advantages are obvious, even to an amateur student of strategy.

" Very well. Then, how to do it ? By attacking his outposts in Palestine and Mesopotamia ? No ! These are important, but their influence is only secondary. We must strike nearer home. We must strike hard and suddenly. Remembering always that the Turk is a fine defensive fighter—but, once rattled, he is very easy prey.

" At this point I read a homily on secrecy, which was the very essence of the attack I proposed. It is, of course, impossible to make the necessary preparations that this expedition has entailed without someone hearing about it. So I suggested a dummy purpose. Let us decide on a landing, ostensibly in Palestine. Actually, we were to descend on the coasts of Thrace—or even of Bulgaria.

" This caught their imagination. One or two

queried a landing—thinking of Gallipoli, of course. But I pointed out that on the very mistakes made there our success would be built. This brought me up to my main points.

"The danger of an amphibious enterprise, as Gallipoli had proved, was dual control. When you have two men of different ideas, and maybe conflicting personalities, controlling two essential and interdependent services, then you are not likely to go far. Not that I wanted to teach the sailors their business, of course. But this was a military enterprise, and I inisted that the Navy must fit in its plans to suit mine, not vice versa. I did not want a recurrence of the fiasco when battleships were withdrawn a few days before a general attack. I had to argue this point hard, but I got my way. I was given complete command of all forces engaged in the expedition. I was then allowed to suggest the naval commander I preferred, and in Rear-Admiral Locke I have got the man I wanted.

"And so, as you know, details of force and material were settled. And, gentlemen, I have undertaken to knock out Turkey without the addition of a single man.

"In the meantime, my own Intelligence Service have been very active. I never trusted the official one—in Turkey, at any rate. Had it been reliable, the story of Gallipoli would have been re-told. But doubtless you noticed the absence from our

ranks of Atkinson. He was one of seven men I sent to Turkey. They did their job well. I have every item of information that I need.

" Now, perhaps, comes the most surprising part of the story. While you were embarking at Marseilles I flew to London. At my request, the War Council was called to meet me. I anticipated a great storm. I had a nasty surprise for them. But first I told them that all the plans had worked out wonderfully well, and that I had a real confidence in my men. Then I came back to my point about secrecy. I had said before that I would not attack unless I knew that my plan was a surprise. Very well. The Turks knew all about the proposed landing in Palestine, of course. I repeated that phrase, ' *all about* ' the proposed landing in Palestine. What I meant was, I explained, the Turks knew quite well that it was a bogey, and that an attack on Thrace was contemplated. Here the members of the Council began to look at one another, but I made them look at me. Yes, I said, the secret was out. How it had leaked out, since only the Cabinet was in the know—that was their affair to find out. But I proved it beyond doubt by producing Atkinson's letter from Constantinople, enclosing a secret Turkish Army order.

" The Council were flabbergasted, so I flung my bombshell into the confusion. They need not worry, I said. I confessed that I had been leading them right up the garden. I knew well enough that

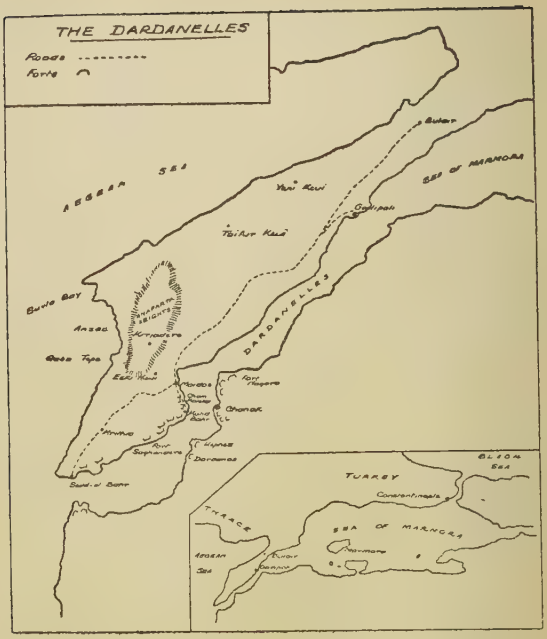
the secret would not be kept—could not be kept—under present conditions. So I told them the rest of the story. I had never intended to land in Thrace any more than in Palestine. All along my real objective had been——"

"Gallipoli!" It was Worton Spender who rasped it out. Beads of perspiration were trinkling down his massive forehead, and his eyes glowed as with a supernatural light.

"Right! Gallipoli! Briefly I went through the arguments in favour—the stock ones. In addition, we now had the certainty of complete surprise. I showed them details of the disposition of the Turkish forces, which amazed them. In the end I got my way. My instructions were amended. I could land where I thought fit. So I rejoined you in mid-Mediterranean. Probably in four days from now our adventure will start."

He paused for a moment. It was time, for the buzz of excited whispers could no longer be suppressed. There was a thrill in the air. Duncan gave it time to simmer and settle.

"Before you leave to-night you will receive your battle orders. This is the general plan. The disposition of the Turkish forces is as follows: on the Peninsula, two divisions: holding the Bulair lines, two divisions: in Thrace, four divisions: in Constantinople, two divisions. Our threat has worked well, for recently four divisions have been transferred to Thrace or Palestine.


THE DARDANELLES
Roads
Forts
AEGEAN SEA
Suvla
SEA OF MARMORA
Yeni Keui
Gallipoli
Tekir Kui
Suvla Bay
Anzac
Krithia
Gaba Tepe
Eski Keui
DARDANELLES
Kephez Point
Fort Rumeli
Chanak
Kum Kale
Helles
Fort Sedd-el-Bahr
Dardanos
Sedd-el-Bahr
BLACK SEA
TURKEY
Constantinople
THRACE
SEA OF MARMORA
Aegean Sea
Rodosto
River Maritza

Several schemes are open to us. We could capture the Bulair lines—I know we could do it. But that in itself is insufficient. We could never starve out the army in the Peninsula, for its main communications are by sea. No, the key to the situation is the Narrows : these we must capture, and let the navy through to Marmora. Then things will move. At the same time, the land lines must be blocked.

" This, then, is the scheme. The Naval Division will land to the south-west of the Bulair lines. It may take the lines ; it may not. That depends upon circumstances : anyhow, it is not essential either way. It will probably do better to establish a line *facing* Bulair. A series of posts would do, if communications permit supplies. The only thing is to prevent reinforcements coming to the Peninsula by land. I anticipate no great difficulty here. Remember that the Turk is a fine defender, but a poor attacker. Our own isolated groups and posts must, of course, hold out—remembering that if we are not through the Narrows within three days the adventure has failed.

" The Old Division will land near Anzac. Without establishing a base, it will advance on Maidos. One weak Turkish division opposes it : an advance of five miles, and the Narrows are ours. I think we can do it. Once we command the European side of the Narrows—well, Atkinson has provided us with some very useful men,

whom I have already handed over to Admiral Locke.

"That is the idea of the first phase : that is enough for now. The work will be done at night—when the Turk is at his worst. But there will be hardship and privation, of course. Yet we shall succeed, and that soon. So get back to your transports, study your orders, and let every one of your men understand exactly what he is to do."

There was a fire in the handshake that Duncan gave to each man as he left the cabin. Every heart was gay. Was there one Britisher alive who had not felt bitterly the sting of the failure at Gallipoli ? And here was the chance the Britisher loves most in the world—the chance of a second fight. But conditions were changed. Ours was no expedition muddling along under a political-military-naval direction. We were under a man who knew his own mind. This was no chance essay, decided upon casually when other ideas had fizzled out. Although the time had been short, not a detail had been overlooked. And this was no affair wherein deliberate warning of our intentions had been given. We held that priceless military advantage—surprise.

Worton Spender held back till the others had gone. I guessed what all this meant to him—the man who had inspired the first attack on the Peninsula. Duncan shook him warmly by the hand.

"I can never thank you enough for letting me into this," Spender said. "Never—never!"

"That's all right," Duncan replied, and I could have sworn that he winked. "Remember our success comes directly from your mistakes. Anyway, you shall be the first man to enter Constantinople—I promise you that."

The whole convoy of transports arrived off Imbros next afternoon. There the perfection of detail which we had worked out was revealed. Only forty-eight hours before, a fleet of beetles[1] had arrived. In the still waters they glided slowly alongside the transports. Hardly a man of our whole force actually set foot on land. We were taking no chances, for Imbros teemed with spies. Certain of the advanced naval party had been instructed to make leading "indiscretions," and our Intelligence folk chuckled as one message after another left the island, confirming to the Turks that our destination was indeed Thrace.[2]

The transhipment took three hours, and this represented very quick work. The men—in tropical outfit, for it was more than warm—carried three days' rations, two full water-bottles, and 200 rounds of ammunition. The heavier stores, of

[1] A beetle was the name given to a motor-barge with steel sides and a landing apparatus at its prow. It could transport 500 men under its own power, and, being flat bottomed, could navigate in shallow water.

[2] The spoofing accomplished in this part of the expedition would fill a book—one of the funniest ever read.

course, remained on board, to be discharged as required. I never saw men in such condition. I had read descriptions of how the first attack was launched—the men cheering as they sailed off into the unknown. Our fellows did not cheer, but their keen silence would have disconcerted an observant Turk even more.

As the darkness fell the strange convoy moved off—the destroyers and beetles crowded with khaki figures. Due north was the course, to give the final false clue to the enemy agents. Half a dozen gaunt battleships escorted us. They were old, I was told, but they looked very useful. Three more, with attendant destroyers, steamed ahead to open a bombardment of the Thracian coast near Enos. The twilight is short in these climes, and within an hour our course changed. Soon it was completely dark, though a moon was promised for 1 a.m. Hardly a light showing, the maritime cavalcade advanced. Every man was alert : some were giving the final touches to their scanty but adequate equipment ; others were surreptitiously edging their way through the crowd to the prow, that they might be the first to land. Yet that honour was not to be theirs, for an hour in advance of us sixty gallant men were to be landed from two submarines : to them fell an endeavour to overcome the Turkish outposts without giving the alarm.

As to his own part in the adventure, Duncan was

sorely tempted to land. I dissuaded him. I knew how far the expedition depended on his initiative and personality—one chance shot might ruin it all. Everyone had his orders in the utmost detail, I argued : what is more, they understood them. Let him remain on board the flagship : then, when our plans prospered, he could join us at Maidos—probably to-morrow morning. He agreed—it was logical enough—and, to my utter joy, he detailed me to accompany Fermery and the Iron Division.

The landing—that was Duncan's one anxiety. That we would get ashore he had no doubt, but he had no wish to suffer the harrowing losses of the former expedition in the process. Could he see the force safely ashore he would be content, for he was utterly certain that, notwithstanding trench-lines and unusually strong ground, no one weak Turk division could hold its own for long against ours.

Our destroyer slowed down. Eyes were peering hard through the gloom. Not a sound from the shore ; yet this was no satisfaction, for, many times before, the Turks had reserved their fire till the last possible moment. Yet it was now a matter of seconds only. Our boats were lowered and manned. I shook hands with Duncan without a word. The life of one of us and the destiny of the other depended on the events of the one night. Even now our first beetles were crawling to the shore. Now a dozen sturdy oars plunged

into the lake-like sea. Fermery was the happiest man on board. It was marvellous the way he had changed from an executive to an administrative officer, losing nothing of his force of character in the process. Yet to-night he might possibly be both.

Not a shot ! Not a sound ! What was it ? Our scouts—the complete surprise—or both ? Yet the impossible was happening. Our boat was running on to sand. We jumped out into less than two feet of water. We were ashore—and yet we were the last men to land. Was the whole division ashore ? It was incredible, but true.

But now, from our left, came the sharp crackle of musketry, then the duller boom of guns. Evidently the third brigade, disembarking to our north, was meeting with stiff opposition. From Anzac Cove, the second brigade's rendezvous, came no sound. But I followed Fermery forward : the white patches sewn on our backs were a sufficient guide. Each brigade moved forward in half a dozen columns : yet, in case of any dislocation, every man knew his job ; every man had a compass, and knew his rendezvous for the dawn.

I stumbled over something : a voice called softly—in English. What was this ? Ah, three men wounded from our submarine landing party, left here to be picked up. Hastily I questioned them as the sailors carried them off. Yes, everything

had worked well. They had stalked and killed about sixty Turkish sentries and outposts. Yes, the Turks were taken utterly by surprise—no question about that. Captain Ainsworth had gone on ahead, with the leading files. He had located the main line of resistance—on the heights about a mile inwards. Till then we should only meet outposts. Good-bye. Good luck.

We hurried forward, scrambling up a dried-up water-course. The going was steep, but by no means impossible, and we made good headway. Every now and then we passed some of our old trenches, deserted and dilapidated. Up, up, up ! What a weary slog the cartage of supplies must have been. Ah, listen ! From a quarter of a mile ahead came the sounds of battle. Every man instinctively rushes forward. Where are we ? Destroyer Hill. Yes—then the Turk still pins his faith to the redoubt on Battleship Hill. Very well.

We are now in the thick of it. Bullets are flying about promiscuously, but not in any quantity. Evidently the lines are but feebly held. Guns are booming, but the shells shriek harmlessly over our heads. The Turk is sweeping the beaches, which he has registered to a yard, of course. We wish him well—not a man of ours remains there. Occasionally a battery ceases fire abruptly—one of our parties has outflanked it, and a hand-to-hand fight settles its future. Never mind the redoubts—pass by in the gullies. There's plenty

of cover. Good ! That's the idea. What's that ? says Fermery. What are you going to do with prisoners ? What the hell did you want to take prisoners for—you're here to kill Turks, not adopt 'em. Bring half a dozen along here, and let Moser talk to 'em. Then get a move on forward.

By now we have well caught up one of our columns. We are past the first obstacle, anyway. Easily, too. But that line of hills—those Anafarta heights. It is not quite enough to pass them by : we must take them and occupy them, since they themselves look over to the Narrows. Why, even if we failed in the whole of our task, we have won the Peninsula if we win these heights. But we don't want the Peninsula : we want Constantinople.

We must wait a while, while the advanced companies work forward. We want to take the redoubts in flank and rear, too, if we can. Send wire-cutters forward—scouts and skirmishers. It's hard, waiting. What's the time ? Not midnight yet. Good ! We must wait. Moser get anything out of the prisoners ? All surprised—yes, we know that by now. What ? Only a brigade at Maidos ! Good ! One brigade of infantry and the artillery garrison of the forts ! Good !

But look—a red flare—and another ! Our chaps are round the flanks. Come along ! It is wonderful : not a command, not even a whistle,

but every man charges forward. Here's a trench —covered with beams—what an idea. Opening here—in we go. Two Turks—eyes like saucers—over they go. Dugout. Turks turning out from bunks. Sheer murder. A pity, but necessary.

Ah, the alarm properly given now. (How on earth didn't they get the wind up from the earlier scrapping.) Machine-guns here — be careful. Regular hullabaloo. Who's fighting who? Ah, Fermery's whistle. No more firing. Cold steel. One rush—hand to hand. Real primitive stuff, this. Strange little cough a man makes when you push a bayonet into him. I suppose he can't help being a Turk. Here's a fellow in pyjamas. Strange uniform. Got a revolver, though—he's a combatant. He isn't now.

Jove, that was a hot ten minutes. What a maze of earth-works! We'll leave a garrison here, of course. Half a company. Yes, even a hundred of our men will take some shifting from here. They can collect the wounded. Five minutes to re-form and take stock of ourselves. Red flares on our right: red flares on our left. Good! Everything going well. Leading files forward. We *must* be at Maidos before dawn.

My goodness, this is stiffer going. Heavy undergrowth and stubble. Sounds of action everywhere. Guns bellowing all over the place. But they've got nothing to aim at—they don't know where we are. We can hear the sound of scraps ahead of

us—isolated affairs. We are right among the Turks' guns now. His artillery men don't put up much of a show—individual scrapping is hardly in their line.

Signs of the moon turning up. My word, this is stiff going. A mile an hour is as much as we can manage. A terrific rattle of machine-guns—behind us ! Have the crews only just realised what has happened. Ah, now there's something happening on the left. Ah ! Kirjadere ! Good, we're on the right track. See the lights in the houses. Regular commotion, I'll bet. No, we don't capture the village. Bear right, due south—towards Eski Keui. Keep clear of the track—machine-guns playing on it like hail. Easier going here—all olive-groves.

Our advanced guards must be having more scraps than we know of. Here we stumble over dead bodies. There is a battery which our lads have visited—and left their card. I say, Fermery, look ! Look to your left—do you see that ? Look, that ribbon shining in the moonlight ! That's the Dardanelles—the Narrows ! That's what we've come for ! And we're half way there ! My God, I'll bet those 50,000 dead of ours are happy now. I wish they could come to life again : if they could see this sight they would not begrudge their death. We are going to victory over their bones.

But we must get a move on. The moon has

risen, and we are a better target now. Heavy fighting in front. We've got to pass through the village this time. Fermery is itching to get into the middle of it himself, but we shall want him later on. I'll hold him back. Just wait a bit—our scouts will soon clear the place. The Turk is properly rattled. No wonder. You don't expect to find an enemy rolling up here in the middle of the night.

Come on, now. We're through. What's that? Yes, Sergeant Whistler falls out here to collect the wounded. Wish him luck. Downhill now—damn it, fell into a trench. What do they call this—oh, yes, Kallmaz Dagh. Then our rendezvous is less than a mile ahead. Oh, come on, come on!

We're here! Here's the Maidos—Krithia road. Some road! That band to the north-east—that's where the runners are to report. What a racket on our right—little hell let loose. Guns again—yet no shell seems to have dropped within half a mile of me all night. Enough to turn gunners' hair grey: ready to fire, but don't know what to fire at.

Here's Spender—so he's come through so far. Doesn't he look pleased?—no wonder. Come to report. Centre brigade all O.K., lying along the road on a mile front. At least 2,000 strong still, as far as can be judged. Battalions sorting themselves out, as arranged, for the final assault. By

Jove, 2,000 still left after a night like this—that's good going. And we've left several odd garrisons behind, and there must be crowds of stragglers. Not a bad night's work. I suppose we've only covered about five miles as the crow flies—but we aren't crows.

Here's a runner from the 3rd Brigade. They've been here half an hour—are working round the flank of Yargar Dagh. Casualties? Severe, but plenty left. Have mopped up hundreds of Turks, anyway. Right. Then we can move on. Pass the word along, quickly. What's that? Second Brigade caught a Turkish regiment moving out of Maidos—slaughtered it! Good! All in confusion! Good! Let them take Maidos, garrison it, and move south. We're off again. Uphill—clambering up a gully. No opposition here. Down again—this country doesn't know its own mind for two consecutive quarter miles. Still, these olive-groves aren't too bad. Up again—oh, the Kilid Bahr plateau. This is what we want—this and the batteries on its sea cliffs. No need to tell everyone to press on—only an hour before the night breaks. This is where the most is demanded of our men. Remember what Duncan said: "Plenty of troops can fight; plenty of troops can march twenty miles. I want men who can march twenty miles and then fight." Well, I reckon we've done the equivalent of twenty miles—in the dark too. And now we're going to

fight. Seriously, this time. No ordinary scrap. And without artillery support.

Yes, we know the main line—by Pasha Dagh. Is it strongly held? Those prisoners said not. Machine-guns going like one o'clock. But there's plenty of cover. Keep on crawling. Now, then, one big rush. That's right, boys, you can shout now. Johnny Turk, you're up against it—you've backed the wrong horse this race. Take that—and that! What a medley! No, don't stop to consolidate—come on. We must get among these gunners before dawn.

Slight slope downhill. Ground more open. A few machine-guns would do some damage here. But it's only half a mile, and our scouts are ahead. Another line of trenches—unoccupied. Oh, Johnny Turk! You'll regret all this some day. I say, Fermery, it seems to me that it's beginning to get light. Is the dawn as short as the twilight here? I'm damned hungry.

Halt. Form up for final attack. First Battalion—already advancing on Cham Kalessi. They'll join up with the 2nd Brigade. Second Battalion, you make for Kilid Bahr itself, you know—and hold it. The rest of us, ten batteries of heavy guns to attack—but from the rear. Hold your fire, boys—we're too close in now. Steel's the thing. Get ready. Dawn's coming. Never mind, it's not too late. I'm sure everything's ready, Fermery The whistle—Go!

A wild scramble of a hundred yards ; then a bit of open ground. Run—charge ! We are losing men —but run. Knock the machine-guns out—quickly. Damn the wire—but, come on, here's a lane. Into the gun-pits, boys. Ah, Johnny, got you. All your big guns can't save you now. Sorry, Johnny, but it's got to be done. You had your turn last year. It's ours now.

Scramble down the cliffs—more forts below. No, hang on, Fermery. We've got work to do. The boys will see to that. But we've won, Fermery, we've won ! Do you realise it ? We've won ! The Dardanelles in a night ! They won't believe it, but it's nearly true. Won't Duncan be pleased. If we can hang on here for twenty-four hours, we're through. What ? Yes. Why, it will be three days before Johnny Turk finds out exactly where we are and where he is. Even then, he's got his work cut out moving up against us. Remember the outposts we've scattered about. Oh, no, John, no, John, no, John, no !

Aeroplane ahead, Fermery. Red flares, quick, I expect its ours. Yes. More flares. He's coming low. What's that falling—looks like a parachute. Send a man after it. Eh ? Message from Duncan.

" Well done ! Hope to be with you by midday. Open fire on Chanak, and Dardanos as soon as possible, and send out party to spike

Soghandere. We are attacking entry forts at dawn. Meet at Kilid Bahr. Everything going well, and all orders stand. Naval Division met severe opposition at Bulair landing, but whole force eventually landed successfully. Initial casualties rather heavy, but afterwards good progress made. By 3 a.m. flares reported parties had reached opposite coast. A great night and a great day to come. Congratulations to everybody. But consolidate now, and use captured guns."

There was serious work for me to do now. I hope, by the way, that it will be believed that my head was a little clearer that these random notes might possibly indicate. Actually, with Fermery close at hand, I never got very far away from practical brass-tacks. If you wish for the detailed story of the night's attack, you can, of course, read the official despatches. As I helped to compile those, I can guarantee their accuracy : they were necessarily based on many individual accounts such as my own. Actually, I think that this night's work was the finest thing the Iron Division ever did during the whole of its existence. Other critics have thought otherwise, but I hold fast to my opinion. True, the Turk is not the fighter that the German is—particularly when you have got him rattled—but he is no mean opponent at any time. True, we had an incalculable advantage of surprise

such as was rarely possible in any campaign. Yet I maintain that the night's fighting was superior to anything we ever did on the Western Front. The broken country might well have led to confusion by night even had no enemy been present. Yet, of the whole division, less than 500 men remained unaccounted for (allowing for casualties and outposts) when we were able to take stock during the morning, and half of these managed to join us during the day. No country in France ever compared with this in difficulty of negotiation, as thousands of British and Australian troops will testify. Distances that sound small in miles counted as five times their length in fatigue. Add the continuous series of local combats, small in detail, but cumulatively serious ; add the storming of the central heights of the Peninsula, and the taking of its strongholds ; consider the fact that after all these, in the dawning, our fellows deployed in regular battle order for a final attack ; consider that that attack was made without artillery support, against a pre-war permanent position by troops who ought to have been exhausted, and you will understand that I have grounds for claiming that the night's work was the finest the division ever did.

But then, from the south-west, came the sound of heavy firing. Evidently the fleet was engaging the forts at the entrance to the Straits. How long would it take to silence them ? That was a

serious question, for every minute was of value. Minefields—but our own Intelligence officers had disposed of this difficulty. But floating mines down the Narrows—yes, there was a real danger here. Assuredly we must get into the Sea of Marmora quickly.

It was an hour before the batteries were finally completely located, wiped up, and manned. We took more prisoners than we had intended to, but, after all, you cannot slaughter a surrendering enemy in a moment of success. Yet we found them of use, after all, in trench-digging and manual work. Fortunately, we were already assured of ample supplies from our captures, and could face a week's siege with confidence.

So far we had not been troubled by fire from Chanak at all. So confused was the position, for the Turks, that such an attack was almost inconceivable. But gradually we got the captured batteries ready for an unusual action : there were guns of all classes, from 77-mm. field-guns to giant 14-inch Austrian Skoda howitzers. With most of the types our men had been made familiar, and at 8 a.m. our bombardment opened. Although the Turks on the Asiatic side must have known by this time that something serious was afoot, they must have been amazed when hundreds of their own shells deluged them. Chanak seemed to be overwhelmed at once ; from the fort at Kephez

Point, it is true, we drew a serious reply before we finally overwhelmed it.

Well satisfied with the condition of affairs, Fermery and myself, with the rest of the staff, made our way down the rugged hillside to Kilid Bahr. There we found Whitby's battalion in secure occupation. It had not been a battle, he said, but a massacre. The Turks had been too scared to fight and too unnerved to surrender. Oh, yes, he had had to take some prisoners, but was using them with civilians to dig in about half a mile to the west.

I noticed a filthy-looking Turk close by him in civilian attire—or, rather, rags. Something about him struck me as familiar. I moved nearer to him. He grinned.

"By all the gods—Atkinson!" I yelled. "What are you doing here?"

"Just here on business," he said. "Oh, man, it's been just great! And we've done well for you, haven't we? Mind you, it hasn't been too difficult. In a cosmopolitan country like this everybody passes unnoticed. But I've had a glorious time. When's Duncan coming? I've got a lot to tell him. I was in Constantinople a week ago."[1]

Within ten minutes, strangely enough, I was able to give him a definite reply, for we received

[1] For some details of his "glorious time," the reader may care to refer to *A Spy in War-Time*, by Captain H. J. S. Atkinson, a most fascinating book.

still another message from Duncan by aeroplane post :

> " All well. Entrance forts almost silenced. Light craft will slip through at earliest moment. If you have any men to spare after garrisoning Maidos and Kilid Bahr plateau, assemble them to near Kilid Bahr harbour ready to embark. I shall need Worton Spender and Newman, if still available. Also Atkinson, if you have found him. Your outposts on the heights are reported still intact, and Bulair is firmly held. I hope to be with you within an hour."

He was with us in less time than that. No sooner had Fermery issued orders to collect all men not absolutely essential to defence, than we caught a glimpse of a British destroyer racing up the Straits.

" What about the minefields ? " Fermery asked.

" That's all right," Atkinson reassured him. " I guess that one of our men is on board. Money talks in Turkey—and we had a good supply."

He was right, for the destroyer came up to the jetty without incident. There was an outburst of cheering from the men on shore, re-echoed by the men on board. It seemed as if everybody instinctively recognised that history was being made. The commander of the destroyer could give us little information. He had merely been sent in advance, to make sure that our " volunteer "

pilot was a true man. The main fleet would follow now. Everything was well. He believed that the bulk of the Mediterranean fleet was within hail, and was coming up to us. There were also rumours of another division. Things were moving quickly. Look, there's the *Arabella*—light cruiser, 4,500 tons.

Her commander brought more definite orders from Duncan. Could we open out on the Medjidieh battery and the forts to the north right away? Fortunately, we had anticipated this, and our captured guns at Cham Kalessi were already making merry music.

Ah, here they come. This is a sight worth a lifetime to see. A British fleet advancing up the Dardanelles. Shades of a year ago! Battleships, destroyers—and beetles and transports, too! So the two reserve battalions are here: that means that the final attack is at hand.

From the leading cruiser a boat was lowered, and Duncan landed on the jetty. What an outburst of cheering! Under such circumstances it was remarkable. Here were men who had already passed a night unparalleled in the history of the world, and now were preparing for a further desperate venture. But soldiers throughout the ages have loved generals who gave success.

Yet there was no time for demonstrations. Quickly Duncan and Fermery arranged matters. The Iron Division, of course, was to hold on to its

positions at all costs. With the two reserve battalions and two extra companies which Fermery had assembled, Duncan proposed to move into the Sea of Marmora as soon as the Asiatic forts were finally silenced. Even as we talked, two destroyers towing beetles moved up the Narrows. The beetles were full of fresh men of the reserve battalions, grinning like schoolboys at getting their chance at last. The air was an inferno of noise ; every battleship that could position itself opened a covering fire. And I saw a dozen trawlers fighting their way against the currents. Even our pilots could not protect us against the risk of floating mines. But :

" Spender, Newman, Atkinson," said Duncan. " On board—and to bed at once. I don't want you just now, but I want your wits to be fresh later on."

For an hour excitement kept me awake ; then fatigue told its tale. Daylight was fast fading when I woke. So I got on deck as quickly as I could. Duncan was on the bridge, and beckoned to me to join him.

" This is life, isn't it, boy ? " he said.

" Yes, but what's happening ? Where are we ? " I asked.

" In the Sea of Marmora," he said. " What's happening ?—why, we're going to Constantinople. To-morrow, probably."

" So we got through the Narrows ? "

" Yes. Landing parties were necessary, but they

did the job well. We lost a light cruiser and a destroyer, but our main force is here, including supply ships. It will be more than bad luck if our prey escapes us now."

"What a thing is success," he said, a little later. "Had I failed, after spoofing the Cabinet, I would have been Bynged. As it is—well, you remember I undertook not to ask for a single reinforcement. Nor have I. But the Cabinet, at the first report of success, places two more divisions—from Salonika and Egypt—at my disposal, and sends the Mediterranean fleet to back us up. It is a great game, and we are winning. Go down and read the reports from Constantinople. We've intercepted von Mander's message to Berlin : it's just been decoded. Our news has leaked out, as it was bound to. Riots—fights—revolution—what else? The iron is hot—we strike. The Turk is rattled—that's the time to hit him. Go and get busy. There's plenty for you to do."

I knew, of course, the next part of our programme—to establish a base on the island of Marmora. This was a childish task compared to the one we had faced. Nevertheless, my administrative task was no easy one—the detail of organisation that lies behind every expedition. Everyone was busy. There was Worton Spender, rapidly scanning masses of papers : there were all the heterogeneous staff which Duncan had

collected. Now their purpose was revealed—each was a specialist on a subject now vitally topical.

At midnight Duncan came below.

"It is done," he said—"a most tame affair. No resistance of any kind. We are ashore, and the depôt is being established. To-morrow, at dawn, we make our final re-adjustments and re-distribution of men among the warships. I intend to leave the transports here—they're too susceptible. Now I'll sleep for an hour."

He slept for five. Message after message came in over the wireless, but we did not wake him. But in the first rush of dawn we saw dim grey shapes approaching us. This was a portent indeed—the battleship squadron of the Mediterranean fleet had passed through the Straits to our aid.

I was present at Duncan's brief interview with Admiral Croggan—an interview which afterwards received an enormous amount of publicity, much of it perverted. Yet it gave me a new insight into Duncan's mind. Hitherto, when dealing with superior officers, he had used his natural tact and persuasion in order to get his own way. Now, firm in the belief that he was destined to take command, he threw these methods to the wide.

"Still, it is a rather difficult situation," the Admiral said, following congratulations to Duncan on his exploits. "Our communications are precarious, to say the least."

"Not a bit of it," Duncan replied. "Not a bit of it. The Iron Division holds the Narrows—that's good enough. In any case, Constantinople falls to-morrow."

"To-morrow—impossible!" Croggan spoke most emphatically. "I am risking my ships no further. I passed through the Straits on a direct order. But now I use my own judgment only—and I am not going to blow up my ships on mine-fields. I need hardly say that I shall be glad to assist your further operations in any possible way, as soon as the minesweepers have completed their task."

"I don't think we quite understand one another," Duncan said, calmly but most incisively. All of us, including Locke, were looking at one another in dismay. Was our great adventure to fizzle out in the moment of success owing to an ancient fetish of the British Navy—the fear of losing one or two boats? But Duncan's tones reassured us. Obviously he was not going to let his prize slip away easily.

"No, I don't think we understand one another, Admiral," he said. "First, tell me this, do you regard your battleship squadron as part of the expedition to capture Constantinople?"

"Of course."

"Very well, listen. When I suggested this project, I pointed out that nearly every amphibious attack in history had failed because of a lack

of complete co-ordination between the two services. You remember Chatham and Straughan? I argued the case at length, and I do not propose to argue it again. The Cabinet agreed, and honoured me by giving me the complete command of all arms. Thanks to Locke, the idea has worked wonderfully well, as our success proves. And I do not propose to deviate one line's breadth from the present procedure."

"But, my dear sir—my dear sir!" Croggan interjected. "Remember, I was not placed under your orders as Locke was. In any case, let me point out that there is very considerable difference in our rank and seniority."

"Ah! Rank and seniority! There they are—the two partners which have ruined British military and naval history. Rank and seniority—we think little of that here."

"If we are to quarrel," said the Admiral very coldly, "would it not be as well if our subordinates withdrew?"

"No, let them remain. A few witnesses to this conversation may be very useful. This expedition, sir, is on the point of success; but a few hours' delay may ruin it. Therefore, there will be no delay. If I can get one battleship alongside Constantinople, I don't care if all the others sink on the way. Don't you realise that the first shell in Stamboul, with conditions as they are now, knocks Turkey out of the war? But, listen. These are my

instructions from the Cabinet—and my authority. Read. 'Absolute command of all naval and military forces employed in the expedition to capture Constantinople.' Do you digest that? Now, I did not ask for your reinforcement; but it is very welcome, and I shall use it. The battleship squadron, as you have admitted, is now part of this expedition. Therefore, it comes under my absolute command."

At this point, I regret to say, Admiral Croggan completely lost his temper, and, out of respect for his previous distinguished career, I prefer to omit his subsequent remarks.

"Very well," Duncan said at last, "you refuse to accept the position. In that case I remove you from your command. After we have won we will let the Cabinet decide who shall be court-martialled—you or I. You will haul down your flag at once, sir, and return to Malta or Alexandria or anywhere else by a destroyer I will place at your service. Locke, summon the commanders of the battleships to meet me that I may explain the position myself. And issue orders for the whole of the fleet to move off in two hours' time, as we had previously arranged. By to-night we shall be in Constantinople."

Again, I prefer to pass over the subsequent scene. No good would be done by describing it in full. But I know that we all went off with doubled vigour. This Duncan was a man after our very hearts.

And through the day our fleet of ships ploughed through the waters of the Sea of Marmora. On the bridge of all the leading vessels stood an incongruous figure—a Turkish pilot which our agents had provided. Checking every turn of the wheel, too, were navigating officers—for Atkinson had secured a map of the minefields at Constantinople. Duncan, I knew, was exaggerating when he said that he would be satisfied if only one battleship reached Constantinople, for the pseudo-Turkish battleship *Gayburn* remained to be dealt with.

Although I suppose we were moving at top speed, it seemed slow to me after the events of the previous forty-eight hours. Around us hordes of destroyers flitted about like attendant flies. Their vigilance was needed, too, for a Turkish or German submarine managed to torpedo and disable the *Valliance* before itself being rammed and destroyed. (I suppose Croggan would have turned the whole fleet back at this.)

But by mid-day we were within sight of land, and were running along the European shore. The hours passed with incredible slowness. But then : Boom ! Zzzzzzzzzz ! I saw a wreath of smoke curling up from the forward deck of the *Malplaquet*. The bombardment of Constantinople had begun.

" I do not anticipate much trouble," Duncan said, " except perhaps in finding responsible

people to treat with. According to the wireless reports, Constantinople is in a state of riot. By the by "—he turned to Worton Spender—" hold yourself ready for an important job. I want you to go forward to receive the surrender of Constantinople on my behalf."

Spender stared at him, and then burst into tears. No one could be unaffected, remembering his visions and his disappointment of the previous years. He gripped Duncan's hand in silence. Duncan patted him on the back gently.

"That's all right," he said. "It's all you deserve. It was your idea before mine. And, what matters more, you're the man most fitted for the job."

The subsequent story has been told by Worton Spender himself[1] with a vividness I could never command. He disembarked with our landing parties, and the final advance began. The force—swelled to 5,000 strong by marines—met with no opposition. Such Turkish units as were encountered surrendered indiscriminately. Our information showed that there were two divisions at Constantinople, but it was evident that we were to have a walk-over. No stroke is so successful as a lightning stroke.

In the meantime the bombardment of the city forts continued, to the bewildered dismay of the

[1] *The World War, 1916*, by the Rt. Hon. Worton Spender, P.C., M.P.

inhabitants. Peters, of our Intelligence, was in Constantinople throughout, and says that the confusion was utterly indescribable. Uncontrollable masses rushed headlong down the narrow streets ; the volatile medley of races showed its worst traits. In desperate fear of the unknown, men rioted without reason or plan. The mutual slaughter was terrible. The official German population met with a miserable fate in the sudden reversal of popular feeling. The Embassy was sacked, and some of the officers were torn literally limb from limb in the fury of a mob returned to prehistoric savagery. The climax was reached an hour before dusk. The one Turkish battleship, the famous (or infamous) *Gayburn*, was struck by a salvo of shells, and sank in the Golden Horn in the view of a hundred thousand spectators. Five minutes later one of our shells found a vulnerable spot in the Stamboul Arsenal. The subsequent explosion completed the panic : our advancing troops could hear the wails of despair filling the evening breeze. Compared with the city itself, Pandemonium was a haven of rest, according to Peters.

And in the early hours of the night history was being made. Worton Spender received the Turkish delegates under the white flag. I would have loved to have been present. I can just imagine him in his hour of triumph.

" You are quite mistaken," he said, after the

Vizier had suggested an armistice, "we do not wish for an armistice. In any case, I am not authorised to arrange an armistice : I am only authorised to accept the surrender of Constantinople."

I saw Spender as he came on board the following morning. Firing had ceased, and we were steaming slowly up the Bosphorus. He could not restrain the joy of triumph : it was the greatest day of his life. Afterwards he confessed to me that on that occasion he wished he were a Frenchman, for he longed to fling his arms around Duncan and embrace him. He restrained himself, but could not conceal his excitement. Yes, the Turks had signed Duncan's terms unconditionally. That meant, in effect, complete surrender—Turkey was definitely out of the war.

For an hour we discussed the position and all its potentialities. But all the while our staff was working at feverish speed. Many people have imagined that, after a sudden victory such as ours, the work was done. Nothing was further from the truth. Dispositions had to be made : possibilities had to be considered. The enemy had been decisively defeated, but his armies had not been destroyed. Maybe the war was not yet over. Perhaps the troops in Palestine, Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, and Thrace would want to fight on. Or Germany might force an army through to the rescue. All possibilities must be foreseen and prepared for.

The new force placed at our disposal made things very much easier.

"You have done excellently, Spender," Duncan said. "We hold a commanding position, of course, but you have forced it home by diplomatic bluff. And now I have still another job for you. You will get back to England as fast as boats, aeroplanes, or anything else can carry you. And you will persuade the Cabinet that on no account must Constantinople be handed over to Russia. Never mind about their foolish pledges—they must get out of them somehow. You will find my views in the memoranda, which you can study on the way. Should reasoned arguments fail, you can tell them bluntly, finally, that I definitely refuse to hand the city over. In the present state of public feeling, I imagine that this argument will have some effect. So get away at once. I shall remain here, until the position is completely consolidated."

That this took longer than anyone expected was due, of course, to the Revolution, which shook the jumbled mass of Turkey to its insecure foundations. We found ourselves in a strange position—acting, in fact, as unpaid policemen! "Why, it is harder to win a peace than to win a war!" Duncan exclaimed one day, his eyes twinkling the while. "We knocked out Turkey with 50,000 men. Now we are using 100,000 to bring her round again!"

Yes, it was a long and complicated job. With

consummate skill Duncan allowed the multitude of parties full scope, knowing that their dissensions made his own position more inviolable. But in a month he was quite convinced that our grip was utterly secure. All the Turkish war stores were in our hands : the troops had been interned and were being disbanded ; British forces held Bagdad and Damascus. In short, any recrudescence of organised war on Turkey's part was unthinkable. As soon as Duncan was absolutely satisfied with all aspects of his position, he stepped in between the clamouring disputants. The future of Turkey, he said, would not be decided by stump orators and rabbled rioting, but by a world conference at the end of the general war. In the meantime Turkey would be ruled by a governor with absolute powers, appointed by the British Government.[1] The faction leaders were dumbfounded, but the populace, after a natural momentary hesitation, rejoiced. The new régime at least promised a stability they had hardly before experienced.

So ended, so far as we were ourselves concerned, the conquest of Turkey. We steamed down the Dardanelles in brilliant sunshine, six short weeks after the hectic night when we had seen that ribbon of moonlight from the Anafarta heights. How would history rank our exploit ? At least as the turning-point of the war. These wavelets

[1] The Earl of Wiggeston, ex-Viceroy of India, was actually on his way out to join Duncan when the announcement was made.

lapped history as they fondled the rocky shores, where a strange flag waved in the breeze. As the fabled coast sank into the horizon, I saw Duncan standing in the stern of the ship. Even his steady face could not conceal his emotion. Next to leaving behind a failure, there is nothing so sad as leaving behind a success. He caught my arm in his : there is a great loneliness as a familiar scene dies in the view : we spoke no word. We gazed steadfastly at the last dying hint of our glory. I felt a ridiculous tear appearing in the corner of an eye. Then :

" Come," said Duncan. " We must go and work. Yesterday has gone. We must prepare for to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI

"Not that I object to popular enthusiasm altogether," said Duncan. "Properly directed, it can be distinctly valuable. Unfortunately, undeserving men usually get it, and deserving men seldom. The gross results are calamitous. The undeserving man is encouraged to efforts for which he has not the capacity : the deserving man does not get the encouragement he merits. Take Douglas. He is by far the most competent of our regular soldiers. Yet he has not that faculty of touching the imagination of a nation. What is more, he disdains it. He does not see that there is a great deal of difference between this and the vulgar courting of popularity. And one day it may prove his undoing. At the moment he is loyally supported by the Army because those who come into contact with him—that is, the higher officers—know the value of his work, and trust him. But this is not a war of higher officers : not even a war of soldiers: it is the war of a nation. And the opinion of the man in the street may be shallow, but it is none the less important. Did he read in the paper that Douglas had been recalled and replaced by Feather, he would merely shrug his shoulders and

turn to such sporting news as the papers publish these days. Such an attitude towards the man who is leading the nation's armies is disastrous. You cannot be aloof when you are dealing with millions of people of all sorts. Now, Worton Spender as a field-marshal would have swept the country with him. It seems as if I am destined to do the same. I don't object. I know some critics will say that I am playing to the gallery. Let them. It isn't true, but, nevertheless, one day I shall need that gallery's support. Even a mob can be effective if it is well led. But I am not going to interview all these newspaper fellows just now. You do it for me. Tell them anything they want to know, as long as it's true. But cut out all political affairs. I'll deal with them much later on."

This conversation took place on the evening of our arrival in London, and followed one of the most remarkable scenes ever witnessed even in that city. We had known that some sort of official reception had been arranged, and none of us looked forward to it—Duncan least of all. The sight of Worton Spender on the platform at Victoria made me feel easier. There was a lot of hand-shaking—sincere enough, as it well might be. The Prime Minister and the Prince of Wales made neat little speeches, and cinema cameras clicked merrily. It was all neither so thrilling nor so formidable as I had imagined. But when we got outside the station—my goodness, what a scene !

It seemed as if all London were there. Hundreds of police and whole battalions of troops were struggling to keep clear a lane through which our cars might pass. The cheering reached a volume such as I had never heard. I was told that Mafeking night was mild compared with this day. All along Victoria Street, all along Whitehall, and all along the Strand we passed to our hotel, amid scenes which to me are unforgettable yet indescribable. Duncan was genuinely surprised. Some demonstration was naturally to be expected, though none had been staged. But this was more than a welcome. No Roman triumph ever reached this fervour. I saw men cheering themselves hoarse while emotional tears streamed down their cheeks. It was thrilling ; yet I was glad when we reached our hotel.

It was impossible for us to go out that day. The Strand was utterly blocked with immovable masses of people. The Thames side of the hotel was even more impassable. How Worton Spender ever got through to us I don't pretend to know. But it would take more than a million people to keep Worton Spender away from the place he wanted to reach.

We chattered like schoolboys till Duncan joined us. Although it was only six weeks since we parted, years of events seemed to have intervened. But Spender had some big news.

" The Cabinet are going to ask you to go to France," he said to Duncan. " A new 5th Army

is to be formed to push on with the offensive on the Somme. You are to have it. Between ourselves, the Cabinet are not quite satisfied with the way things are going."

"Oho, so that has come at last, has it?" Duncan ejaculated. "I expected it. After the Prime Minister's remark about 'cave-man tactics,' it was bound to come."

"The operations have not had the results they expected," Spender said.

"No, but they have had the results *we* expected," Duncan retorted. "You remember our conversation about casualties? Did you notice that the second attack was delivered with half the strength of the first? It ought to have been the other way round. Really, Spender, your Cabinet almost makes me long for the days of absolute monarchy."

"And this is the most ghastly part of the whole business," Duncan continued: there was an unusual bitterness in his tone. "The members of the Cabinet passed Douglas's plans for the Somme attacks: now they are dissatisfied. Will they have the courage of their convictions? Will they countermand the rest of the operations and recall Douglas at once? No, of course not! Why? Because it would lower the prestige of the British Army, they say. Rubbish. No frank admission of error ever lowered any prestige, if accompanied by a visible determination to start again. It's their

own prestige they are thinking of—they are afraid to admit *they* have made an error of judgment. So the operations will continue, and that miserable cowardice of theirs will cost a hundred thousand British lives. Make no mistake about it, Spender : I can't claim that the British command has been inspired, but for every life wasted by generals I will find you two wasted by politicians All this will have to end one day—and I don't envy the politicians when the nation finds it out."

" Another thing I wanted to ask you about," said Spender, a little later. He was blushing, almost like a girl. " Of course, you know this Constantinople business has brought me quite a lot of kudos—I'm shining in your reflected glory. So my stock has gone up very considerably. And so now——"

" They want you back in the Cabinet," Duncan broke in.

" How did you know ? "

" I didn't. I guessed. That's just what they would want. Not that they are thinking of you, my boy. They are thinking of the credit you will bring them."

" But I want you to understand," Spender continued, " that you come first—absolutely. I suppose I am really a politician first and a soldier afterwards. But, if you say the word, I shall stay with you."

" Not a bit of it, Spender. You go ahead. With

the experiences of the last few months in your mind, you will probably be of more use to us here than in France."

"I don't doubt that," said Spender. He was grinning. "As a matter of fact, they've offered me the War Office!"

"The devil they have!"

"Yes. That's the first sign of the commotion your doings have made. So I'll take it, then?"

"Yes. And remember this, Spender—Douglas commands in France. Don't let your enthusiasm for me ever overlook that vital fact. Douglas commands in France."

That was just the sort of thing Duncan would say. Here was a unique opportunity to play the political game, and he flung it aside. Spender himself was deeply impressed. He shook Duncan's hand without a word. Many men command respect, but it is a great man for whom your respect increases every time you meet him.

Spender left the room, but came back immediately.

"I've forgotten one bit of news," he said. "You're to be knighted at once."

"I'm not!" Duncan retorted.

"Well, that's what the Cabinet decided."

"Then let them decide something else, and that quickly."

"But, I say," Spender hesitated. "Why won't you take it?"

Mr

"Why don't you?"

"Well, I don't quite know. It wouldn't fit in with my scheme of things."

"No, and it doesn't fit in with mine," Duncan exclaimed with emphasis.

"But it's rather different with us," Spender went on. "In politics, when you begin to take honours it is a sign that you are approaching an honourable shelf."

"Precisely. But, unfortunately, I don't feel like a back-number just at the moment, thank you!"

"But think of the others," Spender persisted. "The Cabinet can't very well give honours to your subordinates if you refuse them."

"My subordinates don't want them! Can you imagine Fermery in Court dress?"

"No—but commanding an army, you know—it's rather different."

"If it is, then let it be," Duncan said, with finality in his voice. "If my Corps and Divisional Commanders want 'honours,' let them have them. I don't mind."

"But people will think ——"

"Ah, there we have it! People will think! I wish to goodness they would! No, thanks, Spender. I decline the honour of a knighthood, elevating me to a dignified position ranking only second to that of the estimable gentleman who supplies us with pork and beans. Duncan is my name: it is good enough for me. I don't want

people to call me ' sir ' unless they do it naturally. So don't you worry about anything. The King will understand. Do you think he doesn't see through your rigmarole about ' public and political services.' He's an intelligent man and a straight man, and I'll bet he winces every time he puts his signature to an ' honours list.' He has more control than I have. Were I given the job of knighting some of your specimens, the temptation would be too great : my sword would descend on their necks instead of their shoulders. No, run away, Spender. Run away to your War Office and think. Think hard ! Think ahead ! After the war is over—that will be the time to talk about honours, both real and sham."

I had some visions of extended leave. For some months I had been working continuously at inexorable pressure. But within a few days we were in France again. The last phase of the autumn operations of 1916 was due to begin : any delay might prejudice everything, since the weather was likely to turn treacherous. I was present at the meeting of Douglas and Duncan. Not a year had passed since they had first met, yet what events were catalogued between them ! Douglas was cordially sincere in his congratulations on the Turkish campaign. He recognised that its effect on the war was vital. Not that he himself could look for immediate relief, but during the winter he could count on reinforcements of a quarter of

a million men, gathered from Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia. This in itself was enough to make him happy. (He did not touch on the tremendous effect on British prestige in the East—quite as important as the purely practical side. But, then, Douglas never was, naturally, an Easterner.)

And Douglas was sincere, too, in welcoming Duncan as his Army Commander. Yet it must have been a difficult situation for him. He might not have known of Duncan's utter integrity: he had had small opportunity of testing it. And here was a man, endowed with the glamour of success, and a close personal friend of the War Secretary. He may have had some suspicions, but if so he hid them nobly. And, I wondered, did he at that time recognise that he was in the presence of a master? But that need not be gone into. From other officers of the old school, as I shall mention, Duncan sometimes met with distrust, and often with jealousy. But I can say quite honestly, from my own observations, that the relations between Duncan and Douglas were at all times frank and were built on mutual esteem. This may dispose of those ridiculous rumours to the contrary. [1]

We dined with Douglas before he went into

[1] I recall one saying of Duncan's about this time. He had been speaking of Douglas's skill in disposition and in general organisation behind the front. "If ever I were to become Commander-in-Chief," he said, "I should like Douglas as my Chief of Staff."

details of the new army and the proposed attack. Duncan had already received information as to the force he was to command. The 5th Army comprised three Army Corps only—the 26th, 19th, and the 9th—with the 3rd Cavalry Division in reserve. But it was to be used as a striking force : the Corps were three divisions strong including our own Iron Division and the Naval Division, even now disembarking at Marseilles.

Briefly the proposed action was outlined. Could we strike forcibly in the very heart of the Somme area, the attack on the troublesome northern flanks might then be made from the south. The way would thus be opened for a final offensive, which ought to compel a retreat on a wider front. The whole of the operations were designed as a setting to a decisive battle in the following year.

I was both curious and concerned as to the way in which Duncan would settle down as an Army Commander, adopting Western Front methods. With the General Staff he established excellent relations at once—certain officers excepted, of course. Few men at close quarters could resist the magnetic force of his personality. And with the men ! Well, I shall never forget that scene outside Corbie on a warm September afternoon. On the plateau that stretches towards Villers-Bretonneux the whole of the 15th Division was drawn up for his inspection. It was a magnificent sight—these

Scots were a fine body of troops, with an enviable reputation. But as the inspection commenced I sensed an electric atmosphere. These stolid faces were twitching with excitement : there was a suppressed rolling of the eye. Duncan moved along the first battalion in line : his inspection was no glancing at buttons and equipment : he looked at the faces of the men. He reached a second battalion : but discipline was no longer a restraining element—they could hold themselves in no longer. Cheer after cheer burst from husky throats : sensing it was happening, every battalion joined in. It was almost weird—a square mile of men shouting like inspired lunatics. Yet it all had an invigorating thrill. I recall one hefty sergeant dancing a wild step and yelling, " Mon, we're goin' to fecht ! We're goin' to fecht !

From company to company Duncan passed as quickly as was possible. He ignored all rules and regulations of military parades. He meant to make a personal link with these men. They were cheering his reputation ; he wanted them now to know him. As we finally left the parade he said :

" Put an asterisk against the 15th Division on my list. If all the others in my command are like that, we're going to do good business."

And yet another remarkable scene followed on the next day. The Iron Division detrained at Amiens, to march to billets outside the town. Duncan and I went to welcome them. The news

of the arrival had somehow leaked out—was anything really secret in France?—and the streets were blocked with troops and civilians. The reception they gave the division was magnificent, but no more than it deserved. But the reception the division gave Duncan was something to be remembered for ever.

Fortunately, I need not describe the September operations—it has been done quite adequately.[1] The 5th Army captured every one of its objectives. True, the 69th Division at first failed to make headway, but a flank attack by a brigade of the Naval Division cleared their path. The Iron Division was fighting a new kind of battle—the advance to a definite objective under a heavy artillery covering. There never was any question about its success: Duncan's one concern was to avoid unnecessary loss. Happily, our casualties were very light, which occasioned comment, as I shall mention. To the division the action seemed rather tame after the wild adventures of the previous months. "It wasn't a battle—it was a route march," was Fermery's comment. The rôle of occupiers of battered trenches proved monotonous, he said, and was only relieved by occasional skilful resistance on the part of German machine-gunners.

[1] See *The 5th Army on the Somme*, by Philip Pears, one of the sanest of the many war correspondents. *The Campaigns on the Somme*, by Lieut.-Colonel J. D. Dewey, is also useful. And, of course, Sir John Douglas's despatches are detailed and accurate.

For my part, I was particularly interested in the new armoured cars (now called "tanks") which were being tried out on the neighbouring army front in this action, if only because Worton Spender was at least partly responsible for their inspiration. Although many of them failed through mechanical breakdown, it seemed obvious to me that a new idea had come, and a big idea at that.

After our main attack we had a time of waiting, while the 4th Army, on our left, moved forward. Everything was going well. Although it was improbable that the campaign would realise the highest hopes of the spring, at any rate, it seemed that substantial success was within our grasp. I could see Duncan's impatience mounting daily as the final attack was being staged. These ten-day halts did not suit his ideas. Why give the enemy time to sort himself out?

And then the weather broke. War correspondents sent home wonderful descriptions of muddy trenches and slippery tracks. There was a note of caution in their articles—a preliminary warning to the nation that little more could be expected that year. This idea seemed to be accepted quite generally. Duncan scouted it at first, until he found that it was shared by Douglas and Rawtenstall, the 4th Army Commander. In vain Duncan pleaded to be allowed to carry on: he was overruled. With communications in such a state, a general advance was impossible, he was

told. It had been tried before and had failed. It was the first time I had ever seen anything approaching real anger in Duncan. Yet he controlled himself admirably. Months afterwards he showed me a plan he had worked out—a spear-head attack instead of one on a broad front. In an attack of this kind bad weather would hamper the enemy more than ourselves. We could reap the harvest we had sown—perhaps more. It says something for Duncan's loyalty that he took no further action at the time. The submission of this plan to Worton Spender might have revolutionised the High Command.

Subsidiary attacks on our army front occupied our attention for the next few weeks. After our dazzling operations the affairs seemed puny—a trench here, a village there ; a hundred prisoners to-day, a thousand to-morrow. Duncan used these attacks as educational exhibits : each member of our strangely assorted staff followed them intently : each of us took a personal part in more than one. We were all thinking ahead, each in our different spheres. But I knew all the time that Duncan was thinking in bigger terms than the world knew or suspected.

It was Worton Spender who brought us news of impending events. He had paid us several previous visits, of an official-personal nature.

" Of course, you know," he said one night, " I have to repeat your principles to the Cabinet

almost daily. They are an excellent team from the administrative point of view, but vision—well, it isn't there. Last week we were considering casualties. By the way, they were very impressed with the lightness of your losses in the Guedecourt attack."

"Now, look here, Spender," Duncan said very seriously, "get it out of their heads—and, maybe, get it out of your own—that I have done anything wonderful here. I haven't. I have done nothing individual to speak of at all. I have merely carried out Douglas's plans. Remember that. All the credit for their success is his, not mine. Why were my casualties below the average? Simply because my men were far above the average. I had six divisions in front line. Three were first-class shock troops: they used themselves boldly but wisely, and they lost only what was essential to be lost. The 69th Division was composed of second-class troops: it ought never to have been used for attack at all. It very nearly ruined the whole operation—and it lost nearly as many men as those other three put together. The moral is obvious. We must use a better class of men. But listen, Spender, don't let the Cabinet feed themselves on stuff of that kind. It's no good them shirking facts. They passed all the other plans for the Somme operations themselves: they mustn't grumble about the cost now. They ruined the whole plan in July by their hints."

"Of course, it's rather difficult to persuade them to see that," Spender remarked. "You see, they think in general terms, and that doesn't always do. They haven't the courage I would like to see—in dealing with the man-power question, for example. But they are improving. I have learned a lot from you, and I think I am making the most of my position just now."

From many casual remarks, I gathered from Spender that changes were pending. Whilst appreciating Duncan's loyalty, I must candidly admit that I thought he overdid it. By this time I was as convinced of his destiny as he was himself. I was absolutely certain that he, and only he, could win the war. This being so, why waste valuable months waiting for events to work themselves out? Yet, of course, movement was difficult, and I can picture the Cabinet's hesitation. And, mingled with sympathy, I can imagine the relief that greeted the news of Douglas's seizure on Christmas day. A British Government always loved a way out! Here was one presented to it free.[1]

Nothing happened, of course, for a couple of weeks, until it was quite certain that Douglas would not be fit to resume his command for several months at least. Feather, as the senior

[1] For an account of the political discussions of this time, see Worton Spender's masterly *The Crisis: 1916*. The circumstances surrounding Sir John Douglas's illness are fully described in the biography by Colonel Biggerston.

General, automatically took over the temporary command. Duncan sat and waited : he made no move whatsoever, though he must have known that his hour had come. But, if he did nothing, other people were moving. The Press, whose elastic imagination had been stirred by his successes, assumed that as a matter of course he would be given the command. The man in the street, as always in war-time, followed the Press. In the Cabinet, however, there was some natural hesitation. After all, the fate of the British Empire hung on their decision. Duncan, they must remember, was not a soldier by profession—his success might be a mere series of flukes. Was it wise to run risks ? Surely we could still make use of his talent by employing him as subordinate to General Feather ? I can imagine the scene when Worton Spender dealt with the arguments.

" No, Duncan is not a professional soldier, true," he agreed with the Home Secretary. " But he is a Napoleon ! "

I suppose it was the Army itself that finally settled the question. Everywhere Duncan went he met with a monarch's reception. Now the British Army is not naturally demonstrative, and the moral was obvious. It was on January 8th that Duncan received a call to proceed to London. I went with him. I waited for him at the hotel with an impatience I had never known. His eyes told me the story the second of his return.

"I have got my chance," he said. "It's a big business, but I can do it. I had a few straight words with the War Cabinet—though I didn't tell them one-tenth of what they've got to know eventually. I'll just dig myself in a bit first. Anyway, boy, I am to be C.-in-C. There are a lot of snags, but we shall get over them. The first job will be to deal with officers who don't like my appointment—these 'rank and seniority' merchants who do their best to lose our wars. That's one point where I was firm. I insisted on dealing with them myself. I will have no unwilling man serving under me.

"Oh, it was very amusing. They asked for a rough idea of what my plans would be. I don't know how I kept a straight face. As if I'd reveal plans to a Cabinet, of all people! But I just talked generally. Some of them looked rather disappointed. I think they expected me to formulate on the spot some scheme involving the capture of Berlin.

"The Prime Minister was very emphatic about the need of a real success during the year. He is very disturbed about the position in Russia, where, it seems, a revolution is ready to break out any minute. He was kind enough to say that he didn't expect me to finish the war this year, but our effort must be big enough to give real relief to Russia. He

needn't worry. It may be bigger than he ever anticipated.

"One unusual point arose. The P.M. asked my views about unification of command. I told him that I favoured it all the way. I saw Worton Spender looking at me hard. He told me afterwards that, not an hour previously, some proposals to that effect had been received from the French Government. I pointed out that nobody could debate the principle, which was unassailable : the real point was to find the right man for the job. I could get on well with Rolfe, but he is not big enough ; in fact, nobody would gain anything. In any case, the French have already promoted him to the rear. Sach, of course, is the best soldier the French actually have. But he is a theoretician rather than a practical man, and I am not quite sure that that is what is wanted just now. It isn't the military qualities that matter so much. We want a man who will make the two armies move together like one team. But go to bed, boy. We've got work to do to-morrow."

I must confess that the point agitating my mind throughout the night was the possible attitude of the Army Commanders—of the ideas of the Army itself, of course, there was no question. Soldiers throughout history have loved commanders who gave them victories, whatever the cost, but generals are notorious sticklers for

rights of etiquette and rank. After all, we could not entirely blame some of the older officers for regarding Duncan as something of a charlatan. They hardly knew him, except by hearsay : so far as they knew, his successes might have been nothing more than a stupendous accumulation of lucky chances. Yet they took it better than I had expected. Hetherley, it will be recalled, was the only one to resign ; both Rawtenstall and Ringe sent cordial messages of congratulation. The attitude of Feather was typical of the man : after all, he had lost most of all, since he would have succeeded to the command in Duncan's absence. Gravely he completed the handing over : then, straight from the shoulder as usual :

" I ought to tell you," he said, " that I shall do my job and serve under you as I am directed to. But I also ought to tell you that I think the appointment is a mistake."

Duncan took his outstretched hand.

" I appreciate your frankness, Feather," he said. " Let me ask one thing of you—keep an open mind for three months. Then, if you are still of the same mind, it would be well if we parted company. You could have the Salonika command for the asking. But will you wait ? "

Feather could do no other than promise. Duncan knew that he walked on firm ground : there did not live the man who could resist his personality for three weeks, much less three

months. As the world knows, throughout the summer operations Duncan had no more devoted and more able assistant than Feather.[1]

The next few weeks were a hectic time. Not that Duncan attempted radical and immediate changes. He was far too clever for that, of course. But gradually our personal representatives were spread throughout the whole army. With the general officers Duncan dealt himself. Unassumingly he made their acquaintance. I never knew such a man for getting inside another's skin. It was not a sudden intuition which made him decide at once whether a man was useful or not. In a few minutes he seemed to know all about a man : his aim was not to find out a man's weaknesses, but his strength—to discover for which job he was most suited. He moved carefully and without haste, but in three months fourteen Divisional Commanders were relieved of their commands. Five of them were given certain administrative posts behind the lines, where they were conspicuously successful. Nine of the new Commanders were New Army men—to my own immense joy, and to the thrill of the Army generally.

And, silently but certainly, Duncan went ahead with his grading of divisions. His scheme provided for four types : (*a*) shock troops of the

[1] For some interesting comments on the reception of Duncan's appointment it is as well to refer to the biographies (or, in two cases, the autobiographies) of the four Army Commanders.

highest class, similar to the Iron Division, (*b*) first-class divisions for all general work, including attack, (*c*) defensive divisions, (*d*) reserve divisions intended only to garrison quiet and unimportant parts of the line. The great difficulty lay in the formation of the shock divisions without depleting the others too seriously. Yet ways and means were found. Consequent on the collapse of Turkey, odd divisions and battalions came wandering into France from all corners of the East. These included a host of fine material, which our psychologists were not slow to discover. A little re-shuffling among the Colonial forces, too, worked wonders. Before most people had realised that anything was happening, therefore, Duncan had a shock force of six divisions—the old Iron Division, the Naval Division, one Canadian and one Australian division, one Scottish division (based on the original 15th), and one new division (numbered the 70th). These were complete in strength, and had adequate reserves which trained with them. It need hardly be said that the spirit of the men was exuberant. They attacked their stern task with vim and determination. The standard of the old Iron Division was rigidly adhered to, and no one asked that it should be lowered.

There was no shortage of divisions of the (*b*) class—good, honest troops of the traditional types. Nearly thirty divisions came under this

category ; the old Regular divisions formed a fine background, the Colonial divisions a leavening spirit, and the London and county divisions solid material. These units might not attempt the impossible feats of the shock troops, but they were capable of any amount of good work : they might not be supermen, but they were at least men.

The (*c*) class of division was in no way inferior to the one preceding. The classification merely recognised that some men—and some groups of men—are better suited to defence than to attack. Theirs, in fact, might be the least enviable task—that of hanging on to the last man. In the last class of all came some of the second-line Territorial troops and some of the divisions necessarily lowered by the transfer of their best men. Duncan was careful, however, to ensure that these divisions were excellently officered and staffed.

" We cannot depend on a natural morale in these units," he said in a memorandum, " so we must depend upon discipline. To a highly intelligent and courageous man discipline may be positively dangerous, since he may tend to do by rote that which would be better done by initiative. Yet in lower orders discipline is invaluable. It is the means whereby nerves are given to a mob, enabling it to be put under the direction of one controlling brain. Discipline units usually depend abnormally on leadership ;

if the leaders fail, they fail ; if the leaders fall, the units fail again. So we must be certain that these units are strongly officered both in quality and numbers. Of the three varieties offered by psychologists, this is a case where only leaders of the ' crowd-compeller ' type should be employed."

I never tired of hearing Duncan's comments on men and war. I remember a discussion one morning. One of his duties as C.-in-C., of course, was to sign the death-warrants of men convicted by court-martial for cowardice. It was the job he hated most of all. Immediately he introduced a revolutionary proceeding. At each trial of its kind one of our psychological experts was present, to study the case and the man. He did not affect the verdict of the court-martial, but his report did affect Duncan's final and critical decision.

" I refuse to sign away the life of any man who was the victim of circumstances beyond his control," he said on this occasion. " It is evident to me that this man—undoubtedly guilty of cowardice—ought to have been taken out of the line weeks ago. His nerve started to go, and his officer tried to cure him by the ' sink or swim ' method. He sank, of course, for any psychologist will tell you that that is the worst method of all. So he failed at a critical moment, and now they want me to have him shot. I shall not ! What about the officer who didn't know his

job? No, no. While we have second-class troops with us I suppose the death-penalty must remain; in any case, it isn't in my power just now to abolish it; but we will at least see that it is employed intelligently."

"What we have to realise," he said on another occasion, still discussing the same subject, "is that a man does not get an attack of nerves because war is uncivilised, but because it is not uncivilised enough. It is largely the time factor which counts. This war is not a matter of merely momentary courage. A man must face danger—and do nothing. He must exist under discomfort without an effort. He must make tremendous exertions to get nowhere. To sit still and fight—the two are incompatible. Only one thing is even more difficult—to be afraid and sit still.

"If I could only say to the Army, 'You must fight like devils for one week—one month—only, and then you shall go home'—why, they would fight like devils. It is the weary, dragging process of trench warfare that gradually changes a good soldier into a mediocre one. He enters the line for the first time primed for battle. Instead he gets merely danger and unnatural restraint. Inside two months he is not a soldier, but a danger-dodger: he knows how to avoid minnies and bombs; how to make the most of the dug-outs. In an attempt to neutralise these obvious tendencies, the Army organises a whole series

of elaborate patrols, the aim being the perpetuation of the combative and adventurous spirit. As patrols they are unnecessary, and the soldier knows it. Therefore they become something to be dodged, and his morale sinks a stage lower. Soon only one thing can save him. This is the highest of all forms of courage—moral courage. Only this enables a man to pull himself together.

"Mark you, not that I have any use for the merely reckless man. A reckless man is sometimes one who does not notice danger : more often he is a man who is so afraid that he will do anything to escape from his fear or from the scorn of his fellows. Both these conditions, as such, are useless ; but both are capable of being guided into useful channels."

Not for a long time did Duncan reveal his ideas about an offensive. But he continually warned all of us about secrecy.

"I give you all fair warning," he said, "that if any part of our operations plan leaks out, accidentally or otherwise, the staff officer responsible for that section will be shot the following day. You are not only responsible for your own lips, but for those of the people in your charge. See to it. I intend to spring a surprise. Heaven help any man who baulks me!"

It was generally known, of course, that an offensive was planned for early April—on the Vimy Ridge for our part, and on the Chemin des

Dames by the French. Such plans had already been prepared when Duncan took over the command.

"Oh, yes, I shall carry out the original scheme," he said, when out one day only with Fermery and myself, "if only to aid the French. We were definitely committed. The idea is good too. With the tactics I agree absolutely. Where I do not agree is this: the operations will pinch out the Montdidier Salient, but—they will not end the war. But I only hope that the French have not bitten off more than they can chew. Deville is absolutely right in his ideas—a short and decisive rupture instead of nibbling attacks. But has he enough of the right class of men? Remember, as we have seen before, a cavalcade goes along at the speed of the slowest horse. One poor division in attack ruins the whole. Deville plans to attack with at least forty divisions. Has he forty really first-class shock divisions? I doubt if he has more than six—and even these would require careful weeding. That is my great fear for him. And, supposing he does break the line—supposing he does get his cavalry through—does he know what to do with it? I doubt it."

"What do you think about a unified command?" Fermery asked.

"I am all in favour of it," Duncan said. "But I cannot see why everyone should assume automatically that the *Generalissimo* should be a

Frenchman. It seems to be a popular belief that the French war direction is better than ours. I fail to see any justification for the idea. Their methods of political interference are even more intolerable than ours. Their grasp of the situation is blinded by sentiment. Their strategy is often faulty. Judge them by one feature alone—on which their own judgments are based: Casualties. The view is accepted that this is a war of attrition—a wearing down of natural resources, particularly in men. It is argued that the Allies, having the largest of such resources, must necessarily win in the end. But is this true? If you could take a life for a life, it could be done, though the war would last an inordinately long time. But the French have never yet succeeded in taking a life for a life. (Nor have we, for that matter.) Do you know that, over the whole war, the French have lost two men for every casualty they inflicted? In the year of the Artois campaign the French suffered 1,300,000 casualties: they inflicted just over 500,000 on the Germans. They gained a few square miles of useless ground and no strategic advantages whatsoever. True, we have not distinguished ourselves greatly, but we have never done anything quite so bad as that."

"No, no. If we could borrow a spare *Generalissimo* from the Germans—now, that's

a different matter. But I have failed to discern the faintest stroke of genius about the whole of the French direction of the war."

"What do you think of Deville?" I asked.

"A charming fellow, and a man of ideas. But, unfortunately, very involved in the French political tangle. Also, he talks too much. You know, of course, that the Cabinet were on the point of putting Douglas under Deville—at least for the period of the spring operations. Yes, it would have come off. Deville talks so well—in English, too—that he fascinated the Prime Minister. Douglas's matter-of-fact bluntness was not likely to be appreciated by an effervescent Welshman. But Worton Spender scotched that idea as soon as he came back to office. I toned down Deville's promises too. His ideas are good, but he just simply can't carry them all out. So there is no unity of command, at the moment."

On another occasion I remember a couple of the official war-correspondents had tea with us. The way Duncan used these men—both with and without their knowledge—merits a story in itself. As a Director of Propaganda, Duncan would have made a hit.

"What I want you people to do," he said, "is to bring the public anticipations down to a reasonable level. So many people think I shall merely wave a magic wand, say 'Pouf,' and the German armies will disappear. We know better, of

course. There is going to be a lot of hard fighting before this war finishes. I am no magician. I have nothing up my sleeve. I can only attack—and attack. We are gradually accumulating a huge mass of artillery : we shall blast our way through. But, unfortunately, I have no new inventions to exploit. It is a pity that the tanks were a comparative failure. The idea seemed good, but somehow it didn't come off. But guns and shells—we shall soon have plenty. My only new idea to be introduced at once is, of course, the method of attack by highly trained and specially selected shock troops. I have not tried this on a grand scale yet, and we must carry out many experiments first. But the day will come ! "

Duncan relapsed into very general talk, yet full of fire and enthusiasm. The two men had completely succumbed to his personality, as they were bound to do. But he distinctly winked at me as they left the room.

" I'm glad you didn't blurt out anything about the thousand tanks I ordered," he said.

But I remember best the day when Duncan came in and slapped me on the shoulder with sufficient force to bang my nose on the table.

" Great stuff, man," he said. His eyes were shining as with a boy's enthusiasm. " I've had three days among the cavalry. They're great stuff, and spoiling for a fight. Horses and men in wonderful condition. A little weeding-out here

and there—for inaction spoils some men—and we have the men we want. I'll ask Worton Spender for the other two cavalry divisions still in Syria. There's an Indian cavalry division in Mesopotamia, too—home it comes. And all these oddments of divisional cavalry scattered about—we'll collect them up. These men are too good to be acting as messengers and officers' batmen. All military prophets say that the day of cavalry is over. Is it? I wonder. All through the war the poor old infantry have talked about the cavalry going through. Do you remember the excitement when a couple of squadrons rode out by Delville Wood? To the infantry it means the end of this unbearable stagnation—when the cavalry go through. They'll fight like hell—to let the cavalry go through. We've got two jobs. Second : to get the cavalry through. First : to teach 'em what to do when they do get through. Nobody's succeeded in doing the second yet : nobody's tried to do the first. We've got to do both. That's when our day will come, boy—when the cavalry go through !

CHAPTER VII

I must confess to being extremely worried as the winter weeks ran their busy course. I knew that Duncan would more than justify his appointment, but general expectations were placed much higher than that. It was, as he had said, as if he were supposed to be a magician, and at a critical moment would pull a rabbit out of a hat—a rabbit of tactics or strategy that would completely confound the enemy. Yet I knew that this was not feasible. We were committed to the Arras attack ; we could not let the French down. That the attack would be well and truly executed, controlled by a master-hand—all that I knew. Yet obviously such an attack would shorten the war but little—it was merely an incident in the vast process of attrition. Would the French succeed in their high aims ? I doubted it. And my fear was that—successful though the operations might be—they might fall so far short of popular dreams that Duncan's stock might slump very considerably. This it was important to avoid. At the moment he had army and nation behind him : to lose the support of either would be fatal.

My counteracting hope lay in the continual

accumulation of mobile forces which Duncan ordered. From all parts of the world they came : cavalry from Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and India ; motor units from every corner of the Empire. The material generally was excellent, but it all had to go through our relentless sieve. There were to be no weak links in our chain. We were able to congregate these forces without much comment, since we spread them over a huge area. Few infantrymen in France realised at the end of March that they had seven complete cavalry divisions behind them.

But by that time things had happened. With the double object of escaping from the impossible salient created by our Somme offensive and of frustrating the coming attacks, the Germans began their winter retreat. I shall not hurriedly forget the scenes of desolation they left behind. We had anticipated the retreat, and followed it up briskly. And then the world began to wonder : how was this going to affect all our schemes ?

" Now we can get down to real business," Duncan said, as the reports indicated stabilisation along the Heidelburg Line. " I have been wanting this to happen. We can now work out our summer plans. Incidentally, we shall soon see what manner of a man Deville is. How will he face this new situation ? That affects us very considerably. Remember, our operation is only subsidiary to his : we shall be bound to support him loyally.

Poor man ! He is having a thin time just now. The political pendulum has swung, and is bumping him badly. The new Ministry thinks him a charlatan, yet has not the courage to dismiss him. No, I don't envy him at all."

Unfortunately, as the world now knows, Deville failed under the test. All we could admire was his wonderful persistence against all odds. With his Ministry and even his own generals against him, he refused to modify his plans. Although the German retreat had obviously changed the whole situation, he refused to admit it. There was a lot of head-shaking in both headquarters. Yet Deville retained his unbounded confidence, talking freely and continually of the wonder results that would accrue.

" I am afraid Deville has not risen to it," Duncan commented. " He doesn't even carry out his own ideas. Quite rightly, he preaches the value of absolute surprise. But look at this. One of our agents on the other side of the German lines has sent it in. It is a complete copy of the French orders for the attack. And the original was captured in a trench raid ! To risk such a document in the front line—why, it is suicidal. To talk of surprise, when every politician knows all details and dates—that means the whole world knows them. And to persist in ignoring the tactical situation created by the German retreat. Oh, Deville, you have failed."

Each day things went worse—for Deville. These few weeks were the most caustic of the whole war. I would have had more sympathy with Deville had his promises and anticipations not been so extravagant. My own worries nightly increased : obviously we must be prepared to share the French burdens. Duncan showed me a private letter he had written to the Prime Minister.

" It is my duty to warn you," he wrote, " that all is not well with the spring offensive. I do not refer to our own part of it. We have been asked to take the Vimy Ridge, and we shall do it. In fact, by exploiting new battle tactics, I hope to do it without undue loss. But the French, I am afraid, are not so happy. It is not that their offensive will not be a success on a moderate scale. It is rather that unduly high hopes have been raised everywhere : the rank and file in particular believe that a break through is certain. These hopes cannot be realised. The divulging of the French plans means that they are now opposed by at least an equal number of divisions of equal calibre. And, as you know, the advantage lies with the defender. So I am concerned as to the probable effect on the morale of the French Army after comparative failure. My warning, therefore, amounts to this ; that, whereas the rôle of the British Army throughout the summer operations was to be

secondary, it will probably have to assume primary place in the Allied interest. Obviously the initiative must be retained by our side. So it will probably fall to the British Army to maintain a continuous offensive throughout the year. It will thus be necessary to revise all our estimates of men and *material* on this basis."

But on the very day that this letter was despatched all my worries finally disappeared. For then Duncan revealed the whole of his plan to the Staff,[1] under conditions of secrecy such as had never before been attempted. To say that we were thrilled is too mild. I knew more than most of the Staff about Duncan's ideas, but I had not suspected the enormity of the scheme. Yet there was plenty to be done, for we had but three weeks before us. I shall never forget Markham's[2] face when Duncan told him to prepare to receive 100,000 casualties in a day. Nor shall I forget the grin of glee that spread over the face of General Albury, who commanded the cavalry divisions. I thought of that Scotch sergeant's yell, "Mon, we're going to fecht!"

"What will the Cabinet say about 100,000 casualties in a day?" I asked.

[1] Of course, each of us for months past had been working on details of the scheme, without knowing to what purposes his own part was to be utilised.

[2] Major-General Sir John Markham, Director-General of Medical Services.

"It won't know until afterwards," he said, "and then it will be too late for it to say anything. Or, if it does, I shall be in a position to talk back Why should they grumble if in a decisive attack I lose as many men as are usually frittered away in casual engagements? No, we must do something drastic. You remember old Rolfe's motto, 'I nibble them!' It was absurd, since each nibble cost a new set of false teeth. We don't nibble: we bite."

"And what will the French do if we break through?"

"I hope they will do as I tell them," he said. "Probably they won't be in a condition to argue, anyway."

Even as we talked, hundreds of the finest brains the Empire could produce were tackling problems of immense magnitude, but for which they had special aptitude. Never has our Intelligence Service reached such a pitch of activity and accuracy. And not a day passed but what someone brought a new idea to Duncan: none was put aside without the keenest consideration.

The birth of the idea of the Suicide Club was almost a romance.

"Read that," said Duncan one morning, passing over a letter. It was headed with the address of a base hospital.

"DEAR Boss," I read, "my number's up and

I've got to get ready to hand in my ticket. The doctors tell me that I've got an aneurism or something, and that I shall live precisely six weeks from this date. I suppose they're right, though I don't feel too bad. But, I say, Boss, can't you find me a good job to finish up with? After all the times we've had together, it would be a tame ending for me to die in a bed. So find me a job quickly, Boss. Let me do something useful before I conk out."

The letter was from Keble, one of Duncan's African veterans. I passed it back in silence : there was a fierce glisten in his eye.

"My God, these are men!" he said. "Yes, I'll find him a job : he shall do something useful. Poor old Bill! But he's had a man's life!"

A fortnight later Captain William Keble, of the 30th Royal Fusiliers, was reported missing, believed prisoner. And the German Intelligence Officers hailed him as the greatest find of the war. For Keble, demanding whisky, was allowed it by an astute interrogating officer. After half a bottle Keble began to talk : after a bottle he was grandiloquently talkative and boastful. In his drunkenness he confirmed everything the Germans wanted to know. He gave away secrets wholesale. Confronted with them, the following day, he confirmed their accuracy by tearing the papers from the German's hands : attacked by the

guards, he seized a chair and defended himself furiously. Two men fell before the rest shot him dead. The German officer got the Iron Cross, and the German High Command chuckled with glee. So did ours.

On this small basis the Suicide Club was founded—yet rapidly it expanded. In ten days nearly a thousand names were enrolled. To these thousand men were to be given a few hours of LIFE. The rest mattered little to them.

April dawned with snowstorms of great severity. Of necessity the attack was postponed. This was bad for Deville, for every day meant a greater concentration opposite his front. By the middle of the month the weather had cleared, and a new zero was fixed. We were to attack three days before the French.

Duncan had no doubts whatsoever on the issue.

"This operation is perfectly straightforward," he said. "We simply blast our way through to a fixed objective. We shall attack with fifteen divisions on a fourteen-mile front. Behind them is a congregation of artillery such as the war has not yet seen. They cannot fail. It is just a question as to how low our casualties can be kept. I don't want to waste a man."

Two nights before zero two Free Companies passed behind the German lines. Naturally, they did not achieve the phenomenal success of the first of their kind. But they did some wonderful

work. On this occasion they concentrated largely on the destruction of enemy guns. To their efforts is due very largely the comparative ease of our advance.

Our storm divisions took no part in the attack —except one company of each, placed in such positions that the Germans could not fail to identify them. As is well known, the attack was a copy-book success of its kind.[1]

The advancing divisions, following a twenty-four-hour bombardment of unparalleled severity, found the German front lines pulverised to unrecognisable shape. From the support trenches came a steady resistance by machine-gunners. Here, however, was witnessed no ridiculous "disciplinary" advances, with men mown down like hay. It was an affair of skirmishers, and ours were the better men. The most serious attack was on the second line; but here, too, our artillery work had been very effective, and by midday it was in our hands. In fact, within twenty-four hours we had reached all our objectives, taken 13,000 prisoners, and 200 guns, and had our new positions in good order, ready to meet the inevitable counter-attacks. Vimy Ridge—a hog's back of bloody fame—was ours in its entirety. All this had been accomplished at less than one-half of the casualties estimated. The whole affair was creditable to all concerned—most of all to Sir

[1] See *The Battle of Arras*, by F. Hamilton, the war correspondent. Also, of course, the official despatches.

John Douglas, who had originally planned it, and the veteran General Feather, who had carried it out. It served a useful purpose, too, in that it gave doubters confidence in Duncan's ability to handle big forces. The army was delighted : it was the greatest victory we had won during the war, and our casualties were nowhere crippling.[1] Yet the thoughtful among them must have suspected things. These shock troops—all this cavalry—were they not to be used ? While they pondered, three more members of the Suicide Club were taken prisoners while out on patrol. And then the French hammer-blow fell.

Compared to standards to date, the attack was a success. No great advance was made, but 40,000 prisoners and several hundred guns were taken. Furthermore, the casualties were not unduly high. But Deville gained no credit : on the contrary, he paid the penalty of his undue optimism. The gains were compared to the promises ; the losses were magnified tenfold. A wave of discontent swept the French Army. The Russian division, which had been used unscrupulously, broke into open mutiny : the spark of disaffection spread. In a political crisis Deville was dismissed, and Petard, his successor, was left with the unenviable job of restoring the morale of the disappointed troops. It was clear that, as a

[1] In fact, eleven of the divisions employed took an immediate part in the subsequent operations.

striking force, the French Army must be considered as negligible for several months. On us the brunt of the burden must fall.

Our H.Q. was one mass of activity. No command was better served by its Intelligence than ours ; Duncan rightly considered it his most important branch : reports from the German side poured in continuously. We chuckled as we read them.

" The absence of tanks from the British attack indicates that this weapon has been abandoned as worthless. This confirms previous reports." (I recalled Duncan's talk with the war correspondents !)

" The much-vaunted ' Iron ' troops of the British were all in action. Although of superior quality to their fellows, they failed to shake our line, which was never in serious danger." Thus read another report.

Another document, drawn up by the German Quartermaster-General himself, was a wonderful appreciation of the situation, as it appeared to the German point of view.

" The French may be ignored as an attacking force," he concluded. " In fact, their front offers unique opportunities for attack. From the British, desultory attacks must be expected, but it is evident from information derived from prisoners that this is their main effort of the year. Furthermore, it is very doubtful if the British command

has the ability to mount an attack on a really large scale."

So confident did he feel, in fact, that eight German divisions were transferred to Italy to aid the Austrians in their projected attack.

It was a great decision for Duncan to take. Arras was easy: even had he failed, it would only have meant a slight prolongation of the war—never defeat. But now he was risking everything.

"It has got to be done," he said. "In a series of casual scraps, spread over years, we lose more men than the Germans, and though at the end we shall win, we shall be so exhausted that the peace will not be worth winning. Since the first weeks of the war, neither side has really risked anything. There has been hardly anything approaching a general action. But now, I shall decide. Worton Spender comes over to-morrow. Not that I intend to make him responsible—not in the slightest degree. But I would like him to see everything."

The last sun of April was setting—a blood-red splash reminiscent of its blood-red history. What hopes had been dashed to the ground! What confidence had been lost! I thought sadly of those millions in horizon blue, brave men, good soldiers, with so much at stake. I recalled the scenes I had witnessed: old recuits, fathers of families, pleading with the demoralised infantrymen to retain their discipline. I recalled Petard—the reticent and frigid Petard—working himself to fever-heat

in the unwonted rôle of mob-orator. Yes, we must do something to assist these men in their hour of despair. They had borne our burden in the early days of the war—we must never forget that.

So April and its hopes faded out, and the people in England went to bed. They did not know of the strange things that were happening while they slept : of the men of determined mien who were congregated in trenches : of the iron giants which mowed their cumbrous way to position : of the impatient horses pawing the ground not far in the rear. The British Army tightened its belts and got ready for the fight of its life : and Markham prepared to receive his 100,000 casualties.

Following my universal plan, I propose to relate my personal impressions of the battle. Students of tactics will find plenty of information in the numberless books which have already been published.[1] Yet a brief description of the general conception is necessary.

I have frequently referred to Duncan's insistence upon surprise. On a small scale, a surprise was possible : on a large scale, it was not, so it seemed. The huge preparations involved—the creation of immense dumps of ammunition and supplies, the congregation of artillery, the massing of troops, the continuous movement on road and rail—all these told their own tale to an observant

[1] The best are : *The Final Phase*, by Major-General G. T. Montgomery ; *The Campaign in Artois*, by Philip Pears. And, again, Duncan's official despatches.

enemy. This, then, was Duncan's first problem : to launch a big-scale attack without any of these preparations. His greatest friend and ally was darkness—never yet used to advantage by either adversary, but now a friend in need.

His second problem was to mislead the enemy as to his intentions. This lay within the sphere of Intelligence, and I have quoted reports to show how well this task was accomplished. On the morning of our attack, the twenty-mile front between Armentières and Lens was held by eight German divisions. Four of these were very weak, having recently passed through the furnace at Vimy.

A third problem was the utilisation of a mode of attack which would allow the mobile troops to advance. Of what use were our armoured cars, if they were separated from the enemy by miles of ground churned up by shell-fire ? We could not afford to waste days and weeks in making roads. The tank answered this problem. Duncan, like Worton Spender, deplored the revealing of the tank to the Germans in the last stage of the Somme attack. But he had done his best to retrieve that ghastly error. He had freely expressed his contempt for tanks, turning his favourite phrase, " men, not machines," to suit his argument : he had refrained from using them in the Vimy attack. Yet, while the German command imagined the tank idea had been abandoned, a thousand of the

monsters were assembling in France—manned, too, by specially selected men. No secret of the war was better kept than the manufacture of these machines.

It must not be thought that we were blind to the weaknesses of the tank in our vision of its powers. Obviously, before the waterguard defences of Douai it must lose much of its effectiveness. But we knew we could depend on its moral effect—not only on the enemy, but on our own men. A dozen tanks, ineffectively and experimentally used, had induced panic and elation on the Somme. What would be the effect of the sudden introduction of a thousand vastly improved machines? Many of these were of the light "whippet" type, which could cruise at fifteen miles per hour over almost any kind of ground. Our calculations were not based to any extent on the usage of the tank in open country—such would be too great an optimism. But we depended on them to take the shock of the first attack—the breaking through.

The German defences were organised in four zones: the first two about a mile apart; the other two at greater intervals. Experience had shown that our massed artillery could blast the first two lines to pieces, so that they could be occupied by infantry at small cost. Our casualties usually began at the third battle zone, which our guns had hardly touched—in fact, a halt of days was

usually necessary in order that a new artillery attack could be mounted. Such tactics obviously held small hopes of surprise, and still less of a break through, inasmuch as the enemy could construct new lines of defence almost as quickly as we could smash them. But here the tanks were to be given their great opportunity. Plunging a path through barbed wire entanglements for the infantry to follow, they would deal with the machine-gun posts, then advance immediately to the next line of defences. A detailed plan of attack was memorised by every member of the tank crews. They were immensely keen to exploit their new weapon, and to open a new phase of warfare.

The Armentières—Lens sector had been selected by Duncan after long consideration. He had three avowed objects : (1) To win a spectacular victory, which would restore the confidence of the French Army ; (2) To liberate important French centres like Douai and Lille, which would invigorate the French people ; (3) To clear the Belgian coast, which would cheer the British people by its supposed effect on submarine warfare. (Duncan himself doubted whether it would have any real practical effect at all !) He took many risks, but fully justifies his policy in his final despatches. It was common knowledge that Russia was tottering on the verge of disaster : at the moment we held a preponderance in men and material on the Western Front—that moment might never occur

again. His tactics following the initial attack were based on the conclusions of Abel, of the General Staff. Abel, before the war, was for seven years a professor of psychology at Göttingen University. Every day Duncan went to him with problems : " Supposing such-and-such a thing happened (giving the circumstances in detail), what would a German normally do ? " Events which shook the world were based on Abel's replies.

A strong wind from the east howled through the night, to our great glee, for our one apprehension was that the noise of the tanks might perhaps be heard as they neared the line. In our front trenches were assembled the troops allotted to the first assault—good, honest, county regiments. A mile in the rear was gathered the host of tanks. And in the support trenches were quiet groups of men who had a look of solid pride in their eyes. These were the men of the shock divisions, who would bear the heat of the final assault, and behind them—horses pawing the ground impatiently, and men gazing eagerly to the east.

Capewell walked with me along the Armentières—Lille road. Staff officers—in duplicate, so to speak—we were to follow up the waves of the attack, reporting to H.Q. periodically. Beside us marched orderlies with carrier pigeons. Not till we reached La Chapelle d'Armentières was it necessary to take to the communication trenches : everything was so still. I was more excited than I

ought to have been. I should have considered what the coming battle would mean to England : instead, I thought of what it would mean to Duncan. Was he right in selecting this ground, after all ? It was almost flat : so many waterways, too—could the tanks negotiate them ?

But Capewell was of the imperturbable kind. I remember his conversation as we passed between the ghosts of what had been houses. Had I noticed that we were fighting in Dumas's country, he said. Remember the executioner of Bethune ? And the exciting events near Lens in *Twenty Years After* ? And was it not in the Lys at Armentières—within a mile of where we stood—that Milady was forcibly deprived of her sinister existence ? Really good literary talk Capewell produced, but as a listener I responded feebly to his efforts. I could see those faces peering into the unknown : I could hear watches ticking : I could hear hearts beating : mine own louder than any.

Here and there we crossed lines of broad white ribbon—paths that were to lead the tanks to the attack before the dawn. Yes, before the dawn. At dawn itself, of course, there is a general " stand-to " by all combatants. But in that hour before the dawn man's vitality is at its lowest—unless he is prepared : the enemy was not. The moon had set. Only the occasional glare of the Very lights illumined the scene. I looked at my watch every few minutes. Not a gun spoke. I

strained my ears in the darkness. Only in the gusty intervals did I think I heard a faint rattle. Would the German sentries hear it? Or, if they did, would they think anything of it? Surely not. But what would they think of the tanks when they saw them? Remember that only a few hundred living Germans had ever seen a tank! Ten minutes to go. What would happen before nightfall? Fancy being here all these months and never realising that the Three Musketeers used to gallop around these very spots. Eight minutes. Will the tanks really be able to negotiate the waterways? Poor old Milady! I wouldn't have objected to her so much if she hadn't killed little Madame Bonacieux. Six minutes. Where are those tanks? They mustn't be late. Could they get across the Douai—Lille Canal? The executioner of Bethune killed Milady in the Douai—Lille Canal—no, dammit, in the Lys. Four min—they're coming! Listen! What a racket! Get ready! Watch yourselves as they cross our lines! Can hardly see them—great monsters in the darkness. Half an hour to dawn—two minutes to zero. A clatter-clatter-clatter. A whistle! And a hundred thousand men sprang from their trenches and followed in the paths of their iron pilots.

Capewell and I separated: it would not do for us both to be killed. I was with a battalion of the Koylies.[1] The men marched with a grim stolidity

[1] K.O.Y.L.I.—King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

that was comforting. Through a tangled, trodden path of wire we plodded : the enemy machine-guns and rifles opened, but we were a poor target. With only a few dozen casualties, we reached the German trenches. Here the attack was simple but systematic. The leading company and two tanks remained behind to mop up the line : the rest leap-frogged and pressed on. In fifteen minutes the German first line was ours on a front of twenty miles. The scared and incredulous faces of the prisoners made me happy. This was surprise !

Desultory action in front. The tanks did all the work—the company I was with had so far fired no shot. Now a grey dawn was breaking. We seemed to be surrounded by tanks—there were eight on the battalion front of a quarter of a mile. These stolid Yorkshire faces expanded into grins as they saw how great their success was going to be.

By this time the din was infernal. From north, south, east, and west thousands of guns were vomiting smoke, steel, and noise. All along our front, from the Somme to the sea, every gun we could raise was pounding forth : from behind us our supporting artillery spat metal at the trench lines in front of us. Flights of German shells passed over our heads. (What a mess if two shells met in mid-air ! said the company commander.) Now, follow the tanks.

Here is stiffer work. The light is appearing, and we are a sure target. Men begin to fall.

But it is all a matter of minutes. The tanks are there first, and then it is the end.

Forward, again. How far have we advanced? Only a mile? It seems more—it always does. Why the dickens don't the people build their houses in villages, so that we can give a name to them. This is just one straggle of isolated cottages. Good, the tanks managed that brook very well. Not much wider than a trench, after all.

A matter of isolated miniature actions. These Yorkshiremen are canny fighters. We must be taking a large number of prisoners. They seem to surrender at sight. Of course, this is a division already badly smashed at Vimy.

The pace seems slow, but I suppose it isn't really. "Remember," Duncan had said, "that it is all a question of time. Remember that the enemy can have his army reserves on the spot in twenty-four hours, and his general reserve in forty-eight. Any exploitation, therefore, should be well initiated within twelve hours of the general alarm. Of course, if I am to put the cavalry through, I must do it within that time: if I cannot, then I must be content with a local success. It is on that question that I want you to advise from the spot."

But now the country opens. We are getting beyond the region of trench medleys. The whippet tanks speed along at a merry pace: the troops break into a jog-trot. Yes, we are moving. A big

effort, boys. Another mile, I think. A hush from behind. Our fire on the German line has ceased. We are due there. Now only the heavies support us, for the moment. But, could we have been transported to the rear, what sights we might have seen. Guns limbering up and galloping forward : men working feverishly, filling in trenches that they might pass over. And behind—not far behind—horses impatiently pawing the ground, and eager eyes straining to the east.

I was sorely tempted to take part in the casual individual actions that surrounded me ; but to-day it was not my job. We were now among the enemy guns : sometimes the gunners surrendered, sometimes they fought to the last. The end was the same, so far as we were concerned. We moved forward. In many instances we found dugouts full of sleeping men : one regimental commander—an early bird—was taken prisoner while shaving ! Like *Arabian Nights* stories were some of the things that happened that grey morning. For the moment war became almost a joke.

The third German line—the last of the solidly prepared defences—lay along the little ridge of Premesques. I waited while it was stormed—mine seemed a coward's part to-day. There was a slight halt while the division formed for the attack. The tanks—reduced in numbers, but still formidable—lumbered forward. A

mighty yell from lusty throats and the infantry followed.

Here the enemy was better prepared, of course : here his reserve regiment was lying. But nothing could stop the impetus of the attack. Men fell, but others pressed on. There was confusion for a few minutes ; then a red flare. The ridge was ours. I sent off my first pigeon.

Only occasional sniping delayed our advance. We were clear of the main fortified lines : we had passed the first lines of defenders. Our next fight would not be an attack, but the repulsion of a counter-attack. Were we in a position to meet it ? I almost doubted it. This battalion was barely 200 strong now—not that casualties had been unduly heavy, but companies and platoons had been detached continuously to mop up dugouts and gun-pits. Halt ! There is a general stocktaking all along the line. And, too, we are waiting.

Waiting for five minutes, waiting for ten minutes. These honest Yorkshiremen have made the biggest advance of the war. Yet it is not enough. Remember Duncan's maxim, " The second attack should be stronger than the first." So we sit, waiting.

Look—look ! over to the crest of the ridge behind us. Men in khaki—hundreds of them ! Advancing at the double, too ! I got ready to send off my second pigeon. For five shock

divisions—the finest men a far-flung Empire could raise—were about to charge the last German posts, and let the cavalry through.

On they ran. The Koylies cheered like schoolboys as they passed through them. Yes, these were men. Not a falter in a stride. The 3rd Brigade of Guards—told to capture Lomme. You could count Lomme already in their hands.

War seems unreal. These houses have roofs. Must I wait again? Damn! It seems an age. What? We've got Lomme! Good! Eh? The 3rd Grenadiers have almost ceased to exist. But they won't mind that—they've got Lomme. Come along. Yes, I know there'll be street fighting, but I must confirm it. I must take at least one chance to-day.

Sharp crack of musketry before us. Hardly a gun at all—but, then, we must have captured all but the very heavies. Yes, I am in Lomme. Here's the cross-roads. See that signpost: "Lille, 5 kilometres." Off goes the third pigeon.

Do you realise what we've done, Capewell? We've broken the German line. Yes, we have, we've broken the German line. Difficult to take it in, isn't it? We've often talked about it, but nobody really expected it. And now it's done. Can you visualise that there's no other line of real trenches between here and Berlin? It's almost true.

Five miles in two hours. That's our advance.

Nobody ever dreamed of that before. And it's only the start, Capewell, it's only the start. Twelve hours before even the Corps reserves can be brought against us—we've got ten left. Twenty-four hours before any real organised counter-attack. Forty-eight before anything deadly serious. I wonder if we've done as well all along the twenty miles. I expect so. These tanks, appearing by the hundred in the darkness, would make the bravest men turn. We've got to wait a bit now, Capewell. Hard work, isn't it? Still, it's our job to-day. Was it Shakespeare who said, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Oh, of course, Milton. These Koylies know how to dig trenches. And I'll bet they take a bit of shifting from a position they take a fancy to. Here's a reserve company coming up. Good! All mopped up? Good! I say, Capewell, have you noticed that there's hardly a gun firing? I suppose we have really captured all theirs. Five miles is a big depth, and they certainly didn't have time to get away.

You know, this is great business, Capewell. Even if we don't advance a yard farther, we've won the biggest victory of the war. Lens must be ours, and we can command Lille from here—look, you can see the church spires and factory chimneys.

An hour gone: nine hours left to play with. We'll probably get the shock here earlier than

the other parts, for Fritz surely has some men in Lille. See, did Dumas mention Lille at all? I suppose it was only a village in D'Artagnan's day. What I used to like about Dumas was—listen, Capewell, listen! Put your ear to the ground and listen! What do you hear? No, I know you're not a Red Indian—but listen! Can't you hear it? THE CAVALRY ARE COMING!

Look at these men—they've heard it. Look at their eyes. Who says the Guardsmen are machines. Who says that Yorkshiremen are stolid? Who says—but look, look! They're coming. Clinkerty, clinkerty, clink. Hundreds, thousands, millions of them. Rising and falling like a rushing river. Clinkerty, clinkerty, clink. They look like men. They're coming! They're here. Capewell, the cavalry are going through!

I had to break off my conversation with Capewell—or my monologue as it really was—for I had work to do. The commander of the cavalry brigade had general instructions, which were to be supplemented by me on the spot. And I had everything ready. Plenty of information extracted from civilians who had left Lille only that morning, including one invaluable railwayman sent by the indefatigable Atkinson, who was now doing great work behind the German lines. I had taken stock, too, of all the infantry units in the neighbourhood, and had received numerous reports as to strength. So

I was able to hand over a complete plan of attack.

The cavalry, a full brigade strong, would disintegrate into small formations and skirt Lille to the south and north. A strong post would be established along the Lille—Roubaix road. There were innumerable country roads which might be used, and these were immediately allocated to units. The infantry division I ordered to stand firm and continue digging in : we must consolidate some parts of our gains against emergency. Two brigades of the Guards Division remained to me—reduced in numbers, but still more than formidable. These would advance on Lille direct, accompanied by tanks. I had worked out a complete time-table, which I hoped would stand. There was but one complete division in Lille, and the lines of communication troops, though numerous, would probably be negligible as a fighting force.

I climbed the church to watch the infantry deploy. They set off in skirmishing order at a brisk pace. And then a squadron of Hussars moved out of the village. Then another, another, another. A regiment of Dragoons turning to the left, one of yeomanry to the right. The sun was now rising high : through my glasses I could see Lille distinctly. But I did not look long at Lille. Below me was the sight of my life. Along the pavé road Yorkshire infantry stood and cheered.

Stupefied civilians laughed and cried. And eager eyes peered into the east, and the cavalry went through.

The cavalry went through. I tried to reason what it meant. No desultory scouting this—the cavalry really had gone through. Not a casual brigade raid, either, for I presumed that success had been equal everywhere—in that case, seven divisions—twenty-one brigades of cavalry had gone. Right clear of trench lines : open fields : villages with real houses. These puny brooks and canals might hold up tanks, but they could not deter horsemen with the spirit of these. I saw them galloping hard across the cultivated ground : they meant to be in time at their stations. Like a gigantic hunt, so it seemed. They rode hard, these men. Yes, a hunt, and they would be in at the kill.

Then I turned my glasses on the advancing infantry. Fine shock troops these Guards had become : nothing of the automaton about these men. It had taken a little time to make them forget most of what Caterham had taught them. But now—well, there was only one better division in the world, and that was the old Iron Division.

The first kilometre took them twenty minutes ; the second even less. So far as I could judge, not a shot was fired. A hundred yards ahead was the screen of tanks. Most of the heavies had

by this time fallen out, but the whippets were celebrating their entry into the war in glorious manner.

But I saw a man fall, then another. The troops were within half a mile of the outer fringe of suburbs. The battle developed. It was evident what had happened : the Germans had hastily fortified the outlying houses. Could the tanks deal with this new kind of post ? I doubted it. But I knew that the men on the spot would find a way. It was to be a soldiers' battle—company against company, the wits and courage of a single man against those of his enemy. I could distinguish the pigmy forms of men : house-to-house fighting of a desperate kind. And I became exceedingly worried. I wanted to capture Lille : I meant to capture Lille : but fighting of this kind would be dreadful in a crowded city, its huge population doubled by hordes of refugees. Thousands of civilians must inevitably suffer death in the desperate mêlée. So it was then I made the decision which brought me some fame—or shall I say notoriety ?—at the time. Leaving Capewell in charge, I mounted the white flag on an armoured car, and drove towards Lille. Through the thickest of the fight we passed without harm, for no artillery was in action. Not till well inside the German area did I halt : calling an open-mouthed German officer, I pointed to the white flag and demanded to be guided to the office of the local

commander. For a moment he hesitated, but there was no point in his refusing. We drove through streets almost deserted. The bewildered population had wisely taken to the cellars. Here and there I saw small companies of soldiers hurrying forward to the battle : a weird mixture they were, too—old men of the Landwehr, railway troops, labour corps and the like, hurriedly dragged from their tasks and flung into an unreality. We halted in the square, and I made my way into the offices of the Crédit du Nord—the German H.Q. Dozens of astonished eyes stared blankly at me. A short wait, and I was shown into a room. At a table sat two German officers, worried and harassed. They were Colonel Stubenheim, the local commandant at Lille, and General von Rubricht, commanding the 34th Corps. Alas for him, his corps had all but disappeared in the last few hours.

Curtly they demanded my business—a white flag was a rare event on the Western Front. Hurriedly I summed them up, and it seemed to me that a little bluster might pay. So I addressed them formally but sternly. Lille was completely surrounded, I said, in overwhelming force. It was only a question of an hour or more before their one division and their L.-of-C. troops must necessarily be overcome. But in that hour many thousands of civilian lives might be lost. And the Allied Governments must hold them personally

responsible for such casualties, since further resistance was mere fatuity. I pointed out that Lille was an open city, and that its value as a military centre had already disappeared—particularly since it was surrounded. So I called upon them to surrender the city without further bloodshed ; otherwise they, and they alone, would be held wholly responsible.

I could tell that my words were getting home. These men were obviously rattled. The bewildering succession of events had unnerved them. When they asked me to withdraw, I knew that my battle was won. No use for them to telephone to Spa for instructions : all the 'phone wires would be cut before now. So I sat and waited. I waited for half an hour.

Yes, my luck was in. For in that half-hour there came in reports which confirmed my threats and their worst fears. The Lille—Roubaix road was cut. The cavalry were in the southern suburbs : in the west, house by house and street by street the Germans were being driven back. Yes, within an hour the city must fall. So they agreed to save the horrors of that hour.

I hid my pleasure very well. What they did not know, of course, was that they still outnumbered us by two to one. We should capture Lille, without doubt, but a little determination might hold us up for half a day. Twelve hours. And we had but seven available.

It took some little time before orders to cease fire reached all units. I sent back the armoured car with orders to our own men, and waited. It seemed long, but was not, before I heard a trot-trot and a tramp-tramp, as cavalry and infantry converged on the square.

The moments were hectic. The prisoners, some 14,000 of them, were rounded up and concentrated. I had them marched to the rear at once, lest some mischance should rob us of this part of our spoil. At first the civilians were an embarrassing nuisance ; naturally, they were exceedingly pleased with us, and wanted to demonstrate their gratitude. But we had work to do. The Mayor rose to the occasion : he issued orders that, at all costs, all roads must be kept absolutely clear. The police and a large force of volunteers helped us wonderfully, and a volunteer labour corps of 15,000 men dug extemporised defences to the east of the city.

By noon, Abram[1] had arrived, and I handed over charge. I wanted to get back to Duncan. But before I left Lille I saw a thrilling and a strange sight. Through the eastern portals of the city poured columns of khaki-clad figures : men on bicycles, men in armoured cars. These were pioneers. No deliberate assault was theirs, but a knightly journey of adventure. They stood or fell by their own prowess : they could look to no aid

[1] Lieut.-General H. J. Abram, commanding the 7th Corps.

from their fellows. There was a jingle of spur and harness : beneath steel helmets keen eyes gazed ahead. These were the shock troops of the cavalry making an unprecedented effort. My eyes shone with pride, hopes and fears as I saw them venture forth—an adventure into the Unknown, from which few would return.

CHAPTER VIII

It was late in the afternoon before I regained H.Q. The roads were choked with advancing troops, artillery and supplies. But I gathered news during my slow progress. Great news, too. Our attack had succeeded everywhere. Lens had fallen in the first hour. We were in Douai ! There was excitement in the air. I saw it rippling across the countenances of those men who pressed forward. There was a strange light of contentment in the eyes of the wounded moving back. I might have seen and felt a good deal more, but I was hastening.

Duncan was unaffectedly glad to see me. Yet he was calm, and, after personal greetings, we were at business right away. Briefly I outlined the position at Lille, and told him exactly what was due to happen within the next few hours. Then I rained questions upon him.

" It has been a strange day," he said. " Usually a commander has an off-time during the actual attack : he has made his plans, and it is difficult for him to alter them. But to-day I have been making decisions continually. Yes, I am well satisfied. But even bigger decisions await me now.

" The general position is this : Along the whole front the initial attack was completely successful. The advance of the tanks in mass caused consternation everywhere, and we took the whole of the first line of defences at small cost. Thereafter the advance varied in speed and depth. In the north and south the best progress was made. In the centre the tanks were in places held up by canals ; enfilading fire, however, carried most of the position, and we were able to get the whippet tanks across by making earth bridges. There was severe street fighting in the mining villages east of Lens. Here were billeted the German local corps reserve, and, although wakened suddenly from sleep, they put up a very good show. But the strong roads in this district helped the tanks considerably. The feature of the whole attack was the comparative absence of gunfire. Our own guns, except the heavies, were hardly used after the first half-hour. Few of the enemy guns came into action at all, because they were captured before they could do so.

" One hour after the first attack a general bombardment along the whole of the rest of our front opened. There were no ridiculous ' demonstrations ' to throw away good lives, but a solid shelling of a density unapproached during this war. After half an hour it stopped suddenly : the Germans, of course, manned their trenches. Instead of the threatened attack, however, there was

a five minutes' interval. Then every gun on the British front opened again on the German front lines. I have no doubt but that one or two Germans were killed in the process.

" From that moment the bombardment has continued, except in some areas where our advance has rendered it unnecessary. There have been many local withdrawals : by midday the story—garbled and exaggerated—of our break through had reached all points of the German lines, as captured prisoners testify.

" Prisoners ? Oh, yes, a big haul. Forty or fifty thousand, I should think. Probably far more. But I am not thinking about prisoners.

" My first decision came early. Was it to be merely a local advance on a big scale, or a real attempt at a break through ? That was easy to decide. By midday I knew that we had won the biggest victory of the war. A ten-mile advance on a twenty-mile front—local retirements everywhere. Was I to be content with what I have got ? After all, I might overstep myself. Or should I go all out for something decisive ?

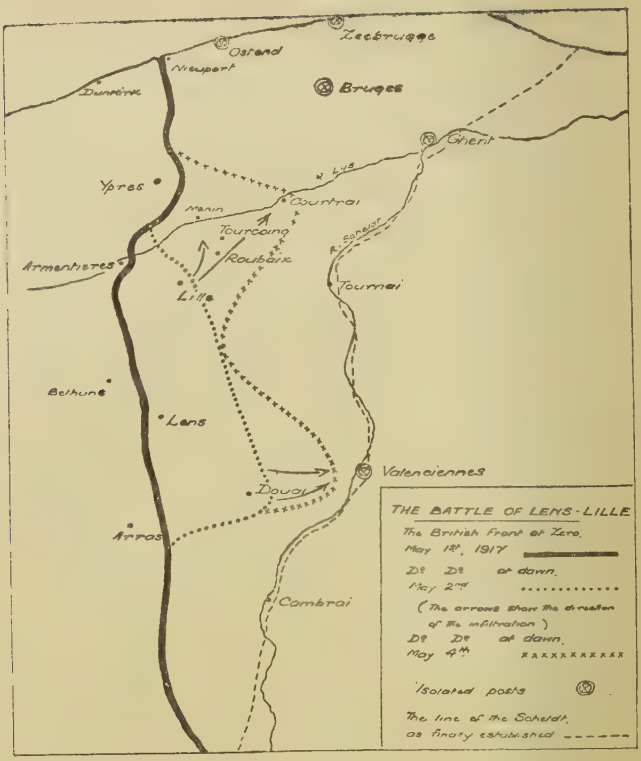
" Remember my arguments of a few weeks ago. At the present moment we are definitely superior in men and material to the enemy. But Russia is crumbling, and in a few months' time the balance on this front may be the other way. True, America may soon join us, but it would be a year or more before her help could be felt. In any case, I would

rather finish the war without America's aid as a deciding factor: otherwise the after-complications might counter-weigh the value of the aid. Briefly, therefore, now is the time.

"The messages I received by pigeon, wireless and aeroplane were helpful. So I decided on the grand plan—operation F, as you remember. If it failed, then I had wasted 100,000 good men, but had given the enemy a real shock, not a mere 'nibble'! I made my decision. I ordered the cavalry through. And they went through: four divisions first as troops of attack; then two special divisions in the manner of Free Companies.

"At the moment the position is this—though it changes every second. From Armentières to Lens the enemy's system of defence has completely disappeared. To the north at Messines and to the south at Vimy our outflanking position has compelled useful retirements. Our main line in the south runs about two miles south of the Arras—Douai road: here we are digging ourselves in strongly: there are plenty of good troops on the spot, adequately supported by far more artillery than the Germans can raise for several days. On this sector we do not need to advance farther south. One Free Company only is playing little hell behind the German positions in the Arras corner.

"We took Douai two hours ago. We might have been held up by the water defences, but owing to


Zeebrugge
Ostend
Nieuport
Dunkirk
Bruges
Ghent
Ypres
R. Lys
Courtrai
Menin
Tourcoing
Roubaix
Armentieres
Lille
Tournai
Bethune
Lens
Valenciennes
Douai
Arras
Cambrai
THE BATTLE OF LENS-LILLE
The British Front at Zero.
May 1st, 1917
Do Do at dawn.
May 2nd
(The arrows show the direction of the infiltration)
Do Do at dawn.
May 4th
Isolated posts
The line of the Schelde as finally established

the surprise of the attack the enemy had not manned them. Our line will probably run by now through the canal system and marshes about three miles east of the town. From here we run along the Douai—Lille road. This last, however, is lightly held by cavalry posts, for three infantry divisions are making a gigantic right wheel, with Douai as the mark. I want to advance east, but not farther south.

" Look at the map. There's the old line. There's the present line. We have gashed a real hole. It is a real victory. But now comes my biggest problem. I want to decide what the German command will do. Its northern army is seriously threatened. Will it, faced with the threat, order a general retirement ? That means, is it prepared to abandon the Belgian coast ? I have put the point to Abel, and he says no. He says—truly—that such a retirement would be tantamount to losing the war. Encumbered as he is with lack of knowledge of what is happening, the German commander will probably give the simplest of all orders : ' Hold firm.' That's just what I want. Let them hold firm—if they can !

" So, while we hold tight to our southern flank, four shock divisions are filtering into Belgium to the north. And six brigades of cavalry are galloping hell for leather towards Valenciennes. No, they won't all get there. But three thousand—two thousand—one thousand men in Valenciennes,

and the north of France is ours. I can wait one hour. Then I will decide on operation K."

The news flowed in from all quarters : it was difficult to read it all. Reports of prisoners and guns taken, of casualties, of villages captured, of information gleaned. At the end of this hour Duncan gave an order. For in a sheltered English bay a fleet of transports and beetles lay under steam, and in dead of that night the Iron Division forced a landing to the east of Zeebrugge.

Few men on either front slept or wanted to sleep during that hectic night. Utterly happy as we were at the extent of our victory, we knew that desperate resistance would be encountered on the morrow. From behind the enemy lines we had reports of German divisions being rushed northward from all parts of the line. Yet where would they attack ? It was a real problem for the German command—a problem of position such as had hardly arisen since the first months of the war. Where would the brunt of the counter-attack fall ?

Duncan was comparatively little concerned.

" It is a principle of German military science," he said, " when a salient is formed, to attack its flanks. It is very useful to know this. So our easterly front is lightly held—for the moment it is but a mixed screen of cavalry and machine-gun posts connected by tank patrols. But our flanks to

the north and south—well, at the moment they are the strongest part of our line. From the north attack is impossible, since the whole of the German force there is already engaged. Therefore the attack will come from the south. Probably between Arras and Douai."

No better forecast was ever made during the whole of the war. The German command concentrated around Cambrai every unit available for attack. It speaks well for the enemy's organisation that within thirty-six hours of the opening of the attack no less than eleven divisions had been rushed to the scene selected for counter-attack ; eight others were due to arrive hourly, and a further nine were pursuing a more lengthy journey from Russia.

This was to be a battle to the death. Should the counter-attack break our front, not only would the line be restored, but our two hundred thousand men to the east would be completely cut off. I had my moments of doubt and hesitation, although I knew that the divisions holding the line were among our best. My own, the 21st, was among them, and I knew that it would need something mighty in the way of shocks to induce it to give ground.

Not until the evening of the second of May did the serious preparations start. Our outposts across the Cojeul River reported the advance of enemy skirmishers ; and light artillery fire opened—to

which we did not reply. And during the night eleven German divisions were marching to their appointed positions.

Not all of them arrived there. That clear and cool night saw some strange sights. More than one German battalion, advancing along the fan of roads from Cambrai, left half its numbers dead along the highway. For here and there, hidden in the copses commanding the roads, were little groups of desperate men. Yes, some members of the Suicide Club were to have their brief hour of glory. They had pushed forward rapidly during the preceding night, when all was confusion, and had sat down to wait and prepare their machine-guns for a few minutes of glorious life. Some of them had been landed by aeroplane in quiet spots far behind the lines : these now made raids on railways and road junctions. No writer of sensational fiction in his wildest moments could equal the adventures of some of these hazardous outposts, where death was certain to come, usually sooner than later. One little group of four men, it may be remembered, caught the special attention of the Press at the time, though their exploits were equalled by others in a score of places. Established at the edge of marsh near Ecourt St. Quentin, they inflicted something like 1,200 casualties on the unsuspecting enemy before their little post was wiped out. Small wonder that General von Erzberger, the German commander

of the 5th Army, is said to have gone white-haired during this incredible night.

With the break of day the attack developed. The battle was one of the fiercest of the whole war : it lasted but twelve hours, but the total casualties on both sides must have totalled nearly a quarter of a million. It was just utter carnage on a narrow front. Each side knew how everything depended on the action : to the Germans, at least, it meant winning or losing the war.

We started with important initial advantages. Our positions were of our own choice : our artillery preponderated ; we had a useful supply of tanks ; the enemy did not know our exact position (most of his artillery preparation was wasted on our outposts) ; and our men were in the mood of victory.

Yet the Germans put up their best fight of the war. Not since the hectic first months had they shown such reckless courage. Dark grey masses came lumbering forward with the steady impetus of a steam-roller. Had our defences been of the conventional type, they must needs have been forced by sheer weight. But ground had no sentimental value for Duncan. He could afford to lose a mile or five miles, if necessary, so long as the line held. So, at varying distances before our main line there were planted machine-gun posts manned by picked men ; every available natural feature hid a little group of riflemen ; and, in the

shadowy copses, whippet tanks waited to pounce upon an unsuspecting prey.

The first wave was all but annihilated by our artillery ; with the second the tanks played havoc ; the third was more serious. Yet such was the desperate resistance of our outpost men—few of whom ever returned—that only at four points were our main lines reached, and only at one—near Brebières—were they entered. Here an immediate counter-attack restored the situation. It is doubtful if such slaughter had ever been seen. Corpses were literally piled up about our posts : here they lay in great swathes, mown down by implacable reapers. Not even on the first day of our attack had the enemy casualties been so high.

Yet, late in the afternoon, a further storm raged against us : this time the preliminary bombardment was more serious, and our units, sheltering only in open trenches, suffered heavier losses. The German command was desperate : our lines must be forced, for ugly news was coming in from the north.

But by dusk the battle was over : in all, sixteen complete German divisions, with scores of hastily assembled casual units, had been engaged. For all practical purposes, they ceased to exist. Not since the days of Thiaucourt had I seen such fighting and such wholesale murder. It was a combat between the fury of despair and the exhilaration of victory. And victory won. " That's the best

news of the day," said Duncan, as the reports came in. " Order operation N for dawn and the preparation at once. Yes, these fellows have done mighty well, and I'll tell them so when they come out. Smashing counter-attacks is not so spectacular as advancing, but it inflicts greater casualties on the enemy. And that, after all, is what we are here for.

" I'm trying to figure out what is happening just now in the minds of the German High Command. Its eyes must inevitably be turned to the peril of its army in the north. Its relief attack has definitely and utterly failed : it would take at least forty-eight hours to bring up sufficient troops to mount another attack in force, even then without any promise of vital success. And, in the meantime, look at the position. We are more than six miles east of Lille : the German troops in front of Ypres are in an impossible salient. Furthermore, one brigade of the Iron Division is at Zeebrugge, which naval forces are now covering : another brigade has advanced to Bruges : where the third brigade is I don't know at the moment, but I expect the Germans have heard about it before now. So you see the problem confronting our friends the enemy. It is not, shall they evacuate the coast ? No, now it is, *can* they evacuate the coast ? They will argue that it can be done : they will point to the terrific action of unprecedented size which the comparatively small

British army has fought : they will argue that fresh offensive action on our part is impossible at the moment—that we would be glad to see them retire voluntarily. They're wrong : there are a few hundred thousand Germans in that salient, and I mean to have most of them.

" The German reasoning is very good up to a certain point. They can count the number of divisions we have engaged : a few months ago they could have said with certainty that the worst of our attacks was over, since obviously we could not raise further troops without weakening other parts of the line. They have not realised yet exactly what the change of command means. Douglas, on the instructions of his political masters, could take no risks. I can—and have. Our lines to the south are held by skeleton crews : the 2nd Army in front of Ypres is double the strength it was three days ago. So to-morrow morning things begin to happen."

He might have said with perfect truth that things began to happen that very night. For along the whole of the British and Belgian lines, from Dickebusch to the sea, there opened a terrific bombardment. It was not confined to front lines, but extended far into back areas. Duncan's reasoning had been correct. The German command, faced with such an impossible situation, decided on a retreat to the line Ostend—Menin. But the intensity of our bombardment caused indescribable

confusion. The order to retire failed to reach some units : others were decimated as they passed down their support trenches, only to meet an even fiercer blast of iron hail as they crossed the exposed ridges. In the Passchendaele district a Free Company worked terrible havoc. And at the first glimpse of dawn the storm burst. Such German forces as remained were instantly submerged in its first shock. On our left the Belgians fought with the fury of men who had waited long for vengeance : to them the greatest credit is due, since their attack was largely improvised. Along the twenty-mile front the retreat quickly became a rout—men rushing eastwards in a mad endeavour to escape the oncoming tide. Yet that was the fate of few. For during the night three shock divisions had wheeled to the north from the neighbourhood of Lille, and at daybreak two divisions of cavalry passed through them and galloped towards Courtrai and Roulers. And an hour before that the Naval Division had landed at Ostend. Yet even that did not represent the full measure of the enemy's discomfiture, for during the morning the third brigade of the Iron Division reached Ghent. The trap was complete.

The withholding of credit where it is due is not a British failing, and we must recognise the competency of the German High Command. Flung without notice and against its own will into a war of movement, it did not for one moment lose its

own head, although it knew already that it had lost the war.[1] It made its decisions rapidly and executed them firmly. But in the stricken land it could do nothing.

"The next move is an obvious one," Duncan commented, as we stared at the great operations map. "A retirement behind the Scheldt. That will be the idea. To their holding the line of the Scheldt temporarily I have no objection: we must halt somewhere to take breath and refit: the Scheldt will do as well as anywhere else. But to *retire* behind the Scheldt—that is a different thing. No, let Heidelburg man the Scheldt with fresh troops. All those to the north are mine. So we will order two of the cavalry brigades from Valenciennes—if they can get out—to Tournai. We can leave the rest to armoured cars and patrols. War is going to be an individualist's affair for a few days. But our men are good and are in fine fettle, so we need not fear. We must expect a conforming retreat on the 3rd and 4th Army fronts, of course. Ah, had I twenty more divisions, I would smash them in there: then there would be no halt short of the Meuse."

Two days passed before I had the unutterable joy of meeting Fermery in Ghent. By this time practically the whole of Flanders had been cleared. Only a few thousand straggling and dispirited wanderers ever reached their friends again,

[1] See p. 317 of *My Life*, by General von Heidelburg.

since we held or commanded most of the bridge-heads. Our booty was colossal, and momentarily incalculable. But in the three days of the retirement we took over 1,000 guns of all calibres and more than 150,000 prisoners.[1]

Fermery was in gleeful humour. He had had the time of his life, he said. He liked it better even than Gallipoli, since he was keener on killing Germans than Turks. Twice he had been wounded, but his magnificent frame shook off wounds as a dog water. All brigades of the Iron Division were now concentrated in Ghent, and in Duncan's absence they gave me a very warm welcome.

During the next few days Duncan made a rapid tour of his fighting forces. He wanted to know how soon they would be ready for another great effort, for he was not to be deceived by the glamorous enthusiasm begotten of victory. Not that that is to be despised. But Duncan wanted more than the mere vigorous rush that it would accomplish. A mere collective intoxication was not enough ; he

[1] Readers interested in such statistics may like to be reminded that during the whole week of the operation—i.e. from the commencement of the attack to the consolidation of the Scheldt—our captures included 1,600 guns and 230,000 prisoners, besides, of course, immense stocks of war stores. Our new front from Ghent to the east, in fact, was entirely artilleried by captured guns. The total German losses in men cannot have been less than half a million. Our own casualties were a little over 200,000, and were strangely spread. Confirming Duncan's theory, those of the shock troops were less than the average, in spite of the colossal tasks they undertook. Even the Iron Division lost only 4,000 of its effectives, nearly half of which fell at the initial attack on Zeebrugge.

wanted cool and determined men who would never turn aside from the path they had set themselves to follow. A less penetrating commander might have been misled by the overwhelming exuberance of his reception.

"These men have felt the strain," he said. "I want them rested and re-trained before I fight with them again. Their spirit is excellent, but they are not of the calibre of the old Iron Division. How could they be? Still, I don't altogether object to allowing Heidelburg time to gather fresh troops up here. There will be all the more to kill. But, oh, had I but twenty fresh divisions!"

"Look at this," he commented later. "A general complaint from the Prime Minister. Oh, he has put things very nicely. Sincerest congratulations on the wonderful victory, of course. Then a few hints. The Minister of Munitions points out that I have used three months' supply of ammunition in a week. Of course I have. And casualties—over 200,000! Of course, I expected more. The C.I.G.S.[1] is very wroth with me, the P.M. says. Apparently I have overstepped into his province on matters of operations. And some of the Cabinet are very peeved because they weren't told all this beforehand. I thought I'd settled that point with them. They're peeved because they look such asses before their friends.

[1] Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

And what a risk—suppose it had failed !—that's what they say. Oh, no, Thomas puts it all very nicely. It looks as if he has been forced to write against his own will. He would much rather talk about the victory, for which he, of course, will get a large part of the credit. But I'll settle all this business at once : I'm strong enough now—I wasn't a few months ago."

Duncan's remarkable reply to the Prime Minister has only just been revealed to the public at large, so I reproduce it in full. It created a sensation in political circles. Devoid of conventional phrasings and euphemisms, it spoke in plain and powerful English. This was no reply from a servant to a master : the positions were reversed.

" My dear Prime Minister," the letter ran. " Many thanks for congratulations, which I know full well are sincere. I am enclosing a brief account of the whole action, together with a statement of our captures to date : these make pleasant reading.

" I am sorry to hear that my actions do not find favour in the eyes of some of your colleagues. I am afraid that they do not seem to have grasped the present position. They do not appear to realise that it is on account of such grumbles as they raise that victory has eluded us for so long. I have previously hinted to you

my ideas as to the status of a Commander-in-Chief. May I speak very plainly, so that you can make the necessary representations to your colleagues?

"I am in command of the British Armies in the west: I have just won the greatest victory in the history of the British arms. My prestige is, therefore, very high. Any attempt to handicap me would mean the immediate overthrow of the Ministry. Any suggestion of recalling me would induce a popular fury. This is not egotistical vapouring: you know it is fact. Some of your colleagues, however, are still living in the dark days of last year. Doubtless you can awaken the sleepers.

"I am sorry to be so brutally uncompromising, but I must run the war my own way. Too often, surely, has England suffered the folly of divided control. I could understand questioning and misgivings at the time of my appointment, but surely their day has now departed. I mean to win the war—and that soon. I know I can do it. But from Ministers I do not want bickering complaints. I want unquestioning support.

"So if the Minister of Munitions cannot supply me with what I want, I suggest that he should be dismissed and replaced by someone who can. The action of the C.I.G.S. shows that he is jealous—a very natural feeling, understand

me, but not in the national interest. He, too, should be asked to resign at once, and Rawtenstall should be appointed. A general clear-out of all doubters would be of great benefit. I want something more than a mere formal support in the immediate future. I want men who will strain every fibre to satisfy my needs.

"I hope the action I suggest is not too drastic; something of the kind is certainly badly needed. Should you have any difficulty on personal or political grounds, say that I insist upon it. That is a good enough reason—at present!

"For you, my dear Prime Minister, my regard is of the highest, and I congratulate you on the way in which you have held the nation together during these trying years. And now, if you can get me made *Generalissimo* of the Allied forces on the Western Front, I will promise you that the war will be over in three months."

I can imagine the heart-shocks of the Prime Minister as he read this amazing epistle. But he knew something of Duncan by this time—particularly with Worton Spender at his elbow. And within twelve hours of the receipt of the letter the Prime Minister was on his way to Paris.

In the meantime the front was not inactive. Although lacking his twenty fresh divisions, Duncan managed to raise seven. With these he

initiated an attack which anticipated the inevitable German retreat on the Douai—St. Quentin front. He refused the usual plan of attacking on the flanks. First, the enemy would be expecting it ; second, because he had not sufficient force at his command. Instead, he drove in a great wedge in the very centre of the region—just to the south of Cambrai. The attack was successful, though not, of course, on the scale of the previous one. On the first day we advanced to an average depth of five miles on a front of six. The threat was enough. The German command abandoned all thoughts of leisurely retirement, and ordered an immediate retreat to the new lines which raw recruits, Landwehr, and forced labourers were hurriedly preparing. This was our cue. Two of our shock divisions flung themselves headlong through the covering screen. Then once again, along the Marcoing road, I saw the cavalry go through : one division wheeled right, a second left. Hordes of tanks and armoured cars accompanied them. The retreat turned to a run : now there was no more thought of saving war stores—or even guns. By the end of the third week in May another 90,000 prisoners had fallen into our hands, together with great accumulations of war materials. Yet Duncan hardly seemed satisfied : although he had done so much, he was thinking of what he might have done had a little extra striking force been placed at his command.

"You see my difficulty," he said. "The burden of maintaining the offensive has fallen on me, yet I have but an army of 60 divisions to play with, while the enemy can command more than 200. And, remember, I can count on little co-operation from the French: first, because they are busy repairing the ravages of their failure on the Chemin des Dames; second, because they are suspicious of me—or jealous of me. To them I am merely another Deville, pitchforked into this position by a series of flukes. Perhaps I wrong them in using the present tense. I hope so. Probably the events of the last three weeks have changed all their opinions. Yet maybe not. For sheer unreasoning, unchanging conservatism, give me the pre-war professional soldier. The Tommy or the poilu adapts himself admirably to the new conditions of warfare, but his commanders are still thinking in terms of Colonial skirmishes. I wonder what is happening at Paris? I saw Petard a few days ago: he knew nothing: he has no definite plans—his one concern is the restoration of French morale. I wonder how he will take it if—if——! I have just wired to Thomas in Paris a brief résumé of our total gains since the first of the month. I have sent a copy to Petard. To both I have thrown out the suggestion that the character of the war has definitely changed, and that, with sufficient energy, a decision may be looked for during the summer."

RT

Duncan was not left long to wonder. Worton Spender arrived during the night, beaming all over his expansive countenance. He wanted to be the first to congratulate Duncan on his appointment as *Generalissimo* of the Allied Armies.

CHAPTER IX

I read most of the newspapers next day—I wanted to get the opinion of the world. There was no doubt about it. Great headlines scrawled across every page. In England it seemed to be assumed that the war was as good as won—there was just to be a final girding up for a last great effort. In France, too, the welcome to Duncan was most cordial. This was really good news, for the French had always assumed that their leadership was so much superior to ours. I was much amused at the attitude of America—just entered into the war. There was a great rush to ' get in before it was all over ' ! But I remembered Duncan's warning.

I suppose, however, that it was in Russia that the effect was most marked. At the beginning of May the country had been on the verge of revolution : now the danger was averted—temporarily, at any rate. Division after division of German troops was leaving for the Western Front, so the Russian Army might begin to look for some consolation after its years of sacrifice.

Petard arrived during the day. He strode up to Duncan and seized his hand : he was not a talkative man, but in a few casual sentences he voiced

his congratulations and his determination to do everything that lay in his power. There was no mistake : he meant every word. It must have cost him much—his pride and his ambition both touched—but he recognised the inevitability of it all. I saw them together : Duncan, Petard, and Feather (who was to command the British armies). They were a fine team, I thought, as I watched them. Then I hurried off to work, for grave news was coming in from the north.

That night Duncan announced his plans to an astonished staff.

" We could, of course, hold our line against the attack which Intelligence warns us is brewing. A mere local retreat of a few miles would not affect the situation at all. To the enemy a break through is essential. Consider his position. He has sustained a gigantic reverse. His leaders know that he has lost the war. They have two alternatives. Either they can continue a desperate resistance until both sides are thoroughly tired of it all : or they can instigate a fierce attack in an endeavour to restore the balance, and then open peace negotiations, while conditions are still more or less equal. The first course presents difficulties —mainly those of morale, already badly shaken. Our blockade must also be considered, together with the gathering accumulation of strength which America represents. So they have chosen the second. It is the choice I would have made if

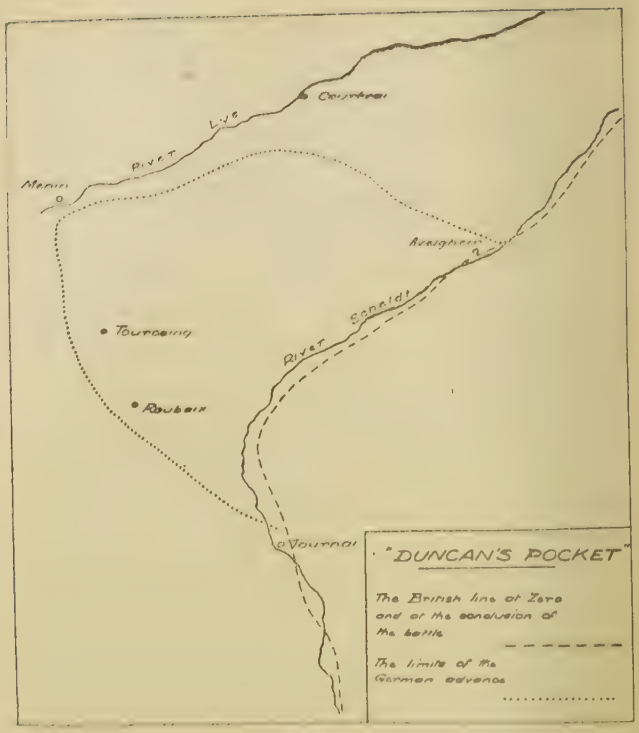
I had been in their position. A successful attack northwards on the line of the Scheldt would restore to them the Belgian coast : that would be sufficient. And that is the aim. We are warned of great concentrations to the north of Tournai : there are to be perceived all signs of an attack on a big scale. Now what shall we do ?

" As I say, we could resist the attack at the expense of local retirements. But ground is not everything in warfare. We shall never beat Germany by winning or losing bits of ground, but only by killing or capturing Germans. So I have thought out another plan which enables us to do this on a large scale."

He proceeded to propound the plan, and we worked through the night at the necessary preparations. The astounding battle worked itself out a week later. I skip it hastily because it can be studied elsewhere,[1] and because even its details are familiar to every schoolboy : " Duncan's pocket " is surely a permanent addition to our national phraseology.

The storm broke on a ten-mile front from Tournai to the north. Our men put up a gallant resistance, but were inevitably pushed back by immensely superior numbers. Three attacks developed

[1] See *Strategical Conceptions in the World War*, by Major-General W. F. Bernetly. Also the official despatches. It will be noted, for that matter, that the remainder of my narrative is in far less detail than the earlier chapters. This is because, while little has been told of Duncan's early career, there already exists a voluminous library on the subject of his later campaigns.


Courtrai
Lys
River
Menin
Avelghem
Tourcoing
River Scheldt
Roubaix
Tournai
"DUNCAN'S POCKET"
The British line at Zero and at the conclusion of the battle
The limits of the German advance

during the day, each delivered with hammer-force. And before the third our battered line gave way : there was a definite breach, and the German hordes streamed through. It was 1914 over again, and Roubaix and Tourcoing fell into their hands. The German newspapers exulted over the success : several thousand prisoners, over 100 guns, and the whole of the British force to the east imperilled. And on the Allied side anxious statesmen asked themselves if they had not been a little too previous in making Duncan's appointment.

Duncan sat almost with his watch in his hand : his eyes keenly followed the fluctuations of the operations map. He said afterwards that it was the most courageous action he had ever fought—in no other were the risks so great. And his was that most difficult task—the deciding of that popular though difficult second, ' the psychological moment ' !

The German command found our resistance stiffening on the second day, as their troops approached Menin and the Lys. Evidently our reserves had been brought early to the scene of action. So fresh forces were being hurried through the gap to drive home the final attack. At the same time fierce efforts were made at the base of the flanks, so that the salient might be broadened.

But at neither base was a yard gained. Had Heidelburg not been so obsessed with his own strategical plan, he might have noticed that our

resistance here was of a very different order from that of his original ten-mile front. Did he succeed in occupying a trench, then he was driven out by an immediate counter attack. He should have asked himself why these tactics had not prevailed throughout. But it is the fault of any commander that he would rather believe an advance due to his own skill rather than to the cunning of his adversary. Yet the trap is the oldest in the world.

And at dawn on the third day it was closed. From the bases of the salient came a short bombardment of hurricane ferocity : then a swarm of tanks crossed our lines : and after them four divisions of the finest infantry in the British Army. These were attacks that nothing human could resist. By midday our forces had established contact, and by nightfall a firm line had been entrenched along our old front. The trap was closed. The advancing Germans were completely cut off from the rear. And in the early hours of the morning they were heavily assailed from the front.

Never was a combat so confused and yet so clear. Each side knew precisely what had happened : each man knew what had to be done. Our four divisions acting as the cork to the bottle bore the heroic part : on many occasions they were simultaneously attacked from two sides. But they made each village a miniature fortress ; and no German passed alive through the cordon.

The position of the German troops inside the bottle was desperate. Some surrendered as soon as the position was revealed : others made a bold fight : one division—the 33rd—covered itself with honour, refusing to surrender until a mere company of men survived. Our pincer-clutch was inexorable. One hope only remained to the Germans—a relief attack from the south on a really large scale. But the whole of the immediate German reserves had already been flung into the action : to organise a strong attack meant forty-eight hours delay—and in that forty-eight hours the bottle had been cleaned out, and the temporary cork replaced by an iron band. Against it the tardy relief offensive merely dashed itself to pieces.

For sheer calculated audacity the conception of this action has never been equalled. It needs courage for a general to attack an enemy. It needs far greater courage to allow an enemy to attack.

" But the war is now more than ever a question of the quality of men," Duncan said, when I put the point to him. " A year ago—two years ago—our men were definitely inferior to the Germans as soldiers, in spite of patriotic journalistic ravings. It is not only a matter of courage, but of training. But now the positions are utterly reversed. With the specialised training of the past six months as a background, with the example of the shock troops

always before them as a standard, with great successes to their credit, and with ultimate victory not only certain, but near—our Service divisions have advantages which the enemy cannot possess. Even with the same men, I dared not have risked this operation a few months ago. But in a few weeks' time I shall ask these same men to work miracles—and they will do it."

"An immediate finish to the war is more important than most people think," he said on another occasion. "Autumn will not do—it must be done now. It is the influence of America I fear. Should she have to play any important part, her influence on the peace conferences might be deplorable. And we are already playing into her financial hands. The trouble is, too, that we are borrowing from her as an ally, so we shall have to pay it back. Had America turned enemy, we could have repudiated our debts, as Germany most assuredly will. Oh, won't the politicians have a happy time for a few months when the war is over!"

Worton Spender paid us one of his periodical visits. He knew nothing of our plans, but he could guess that something big was afoot, if only by the enormous demands for mobile accessories that we had sent to him.

"Really, I ought never to say another word against the British political system," Duncan said to him. "What do you think happened to-day?

Two French senators came to see me. They had been on a visit to the front. General Sardou, it appears, had told them that the projected offensive would cost 100,000 French lives, so they want it countermanded. I corrected them. I said he was wrong : he should have said *a minimum* of 100,000 French lives. You should have seen their faces."

" And what did you do with them ? " Spender asked.

" Had them arrested at once, and asked Petard to give Sardou his immediate dismissal. I will not have officers discussing my plans with any political jackanapes who cares to ask them leading questions. So you might think out some suitable charge against the two—we are in the Zone des Armées, remember—preferably something involving a death penalty. That might serve as a warning to others."

" There will probably be a noise—even over the arrest alone," Spender commented, rather seriously.

" Then they will find that I am now a bigger noise," Duncan exclaimed. " When you get back, prime Thomas up with suitable arguments—I'll see to things here."

But about this period I remember most vividly of all Duncan's short speech to the war correspondents. Such men are singularly unimpressionable, but they had not been able to resist Duncan. One night he had them concentrated after dinner.

" Gentlemen," he said, " I want a word with you. I have big plans in hand. You are bound to see and hear details which bear on these plans. Should you give the faintest inkling, accidentally or purposely, directly or indirectly, by suggestion or supposition, that might aid the enemy in his deductions, you will be shot forthwith, and your paper suppressed for ever. But I do not believe such action will be necessary. In fact, I have a big job for you, and after it is over you will have the biggest ' story ' you have ever written. I want you all to act in fact as adjuncts to our Intelligence Service. Now the enemy has a vague suspicion that we are going to attack on the St. Quentin front—the British to the north, the French to the south. I want you to confirm that suspicion by those subtle touches at which you are masters. Cleverly eluding the censor by ' writing between the lines,' you will describe the huge dumps of ammunition boxes (you need not mention that they are empty), the great casualty clearing stations, the concentration of guns, and other well-known preliminaries of a great attack. You will notice how the dry and undulating country is particularly suitable for the use of tanks—you will hint at a concentration there. You will even take photographs of the Iron Division against a familar background—a company or two will be sent down for the purpose. You will describe the wonderful models of the

German trench systems in that region which we have reconstructed from aeroplane photographs : take pictures of these too. Above all, you will talk about liaison with the French—Tommy and Poilu fighting side by side, and so on. All this will be done very subtly, of course. I know you *can* do it. Will you ? "

There could be no misinterpretation of their reply. Behind their shining eyes, agile minds were already working out ingenious ways of deceiving the enemy. It was a chance they had prayed for. No longer were they a class of suspected outcasts : here was a useful job after their own hearts.

" Did you ever get a reply to your letter to the Prime Minister ? " I asked Duncan that same evening. " That one about the carpers in the Cabinet, I mean."

" Nothing in writing, but plenty in effect," he said. " I have nothing to complain of now : the new men are efficient, and they do what I ask. I could not want more, could I ? But I can foresee a political sensation to-morrow."

" Why ? "

" Well, last week I had a long talk with Fouchard.[1] A good man. He asked me how much longer the Cabinet were going to debate about bombing Berlin and other big German cities. It appears that he has thirty-six aeroplanes that

[1] Air-Marshal J. N. Fouchard, commanding the Royal Air Force in France.

could fly to Berlin and back—not counting several hundreds that could get there, do their work, and perhaps have to come down. He anticipated me only by a matter of seconds. I had sent for him to ask details of strength in this respect. So we had a long talk, and I gave him some definite orders. I have judged the period, but I left him to judge the weather. He has just rung me up to say that the reports are now favourable. So to-night twenty-four of those aeroplanes will bomb Berlin."

I whistled. Certainly it needed no vision to foresee the sensational sequels which were bound to follow.

"Yes, I have deliberately ignored the Cabinet," he continued. "These politicians make me tired. They have talked for years about bombing Berlin. If I let them, they will talk for many more years. They don't seem to realise that there is a moment for every action—and the moment for the bombing of Berlin is *now*!"

"You can face all the stock arguments—reprisals—attacking an open town of no military importance?"

"Indeed I can! No military importance, indeed! Our newsapers use that phrase when talking about the bombing of London. What rubbish, when no less than 15,000 men are detailed to the city's defence. The stronger and more frequent the raids, the bigger this number will grow. Reprisals—well, mechanical reprisals

are merely childish. But, as I have said, everything is a matter of moment. Perhaps I can read the psychology of the German better than he reads ours. That is an amazing thing, by the way. Taken as a nation, I suppose the Germans are miles ahead of any other in the study of psychology. Yet they have made incredible blunders in this very direction during the war. It seems to me that they have not recognised sufficiently the national side of psychology : they have tried to make it a purely German science.

" Now, apart from the diversion of troops for defence, the continued raids on London have failed. Why ? Because they have been and are being made at the wrong moment. You are fighting a man, and you are absolutely sure of victory : he suddenly strikes a new kind of blow—we will say, if you like, a rather underhand blow—that may momentarily break through your guard. But does he weaken you ? No ! Your confidence is such that you are all the more determined to give him a jolly good hiding. You mentally register his blow as a gesture of despair, and your own confidence is accordingly increased.

" But now take a slightly different case. You are fighting your man : you start confidently, but he wears you down : you begin to have a vague suspicion that you may lose—his strength seems to be gaining with every blow. It is then that he produces his new punch. What is your mental

impression ? Not one of justified resentment, but of fear ! A realisation that your enemy is grim, determined, and merciless—that he will stop at nothing to beat you. So you cease to hope to win, and merely try not to lose. That means that you have already lost.

" Apply my parallel. The people of England have experienced nothing to damp their natural confidence. The idea of a long war does not appal them—they are used to muddling-through methods. So the German air-raids were mere nasty annoyances—for which a satisfactory retribution should be exacted in due course.

" Had we raided Germany a year ago, the case would have been precisely the same. Although disappointed in their hopes of a short campaign, the Germans were in a very strong position, and might have interpreted our raids as mere reprisals —a gesture of despair, in addition to an admission of the value of their own raids. But now—oh, now ! What a lot has happened during the past few weeks. I have been waiting for the news to leak out. It would have been useless to raid immediately after our victory, as the German censorship is so definite. But I question whether there is one Berliner who does not know by now that his army has been horribly mauled, that it has been forced back to the line of the Scheldt, and that its casualties have been enormous. (You can trust rumour to magnify these !) His confidence has had

something more than a shock : he is a thinking man, and it is not difficult for him to see that final and complete victory is now impossible. And so we produce our special punch—now, at this moment. So to-night the bombing of Berlin begins : it will be continued while we have machines to do it. Nor will other accessible cities escape. Yes, some of the politicians may rear up, but I will tell them to be good little boys, and that father knows what is best for them. And one day they will realise that I was right."

And, sure enough, they do !

This raid, for that matter, was but the beginning of unprecedented activity on the part of the Air Force. Hitherto it had been content to act as an adjunct to artillery for " spotting " purposes, to carry out a very occasional raid, to reconnoitre periodically behind the German lines, and to shoot down any enemy aeroplane which attempted to do the same behind ours. That is to say, its rôle had been very largely defensive. Fouchard, of course, was working strictly to orders. He had been warned to prepare for a further three years of war, so that undue risk among his pilots and machines was to be avoided at any reasonable cost. But now Duncan told him that he need only budget for a war of three *weeks* ! So Fouchard, being a real fighting man, went away exceedingly happy. And if the R.A.F. lost half its officers and aeroplanes in these weeks, no one can

say that the enemy's losses did not justify such a sacrifice.

On the 24th June, 1917, I was again with Fermery in Ghent. The Iron Division had been smuggled back there by night, and passed unrecognised. Two days before, I had learned to my joy that I was to rejoin the Division. It appeared that Fermery had asked for me. He had consistently refused promotion, because he knew his limitations as well as his capabilities (would that every one of my officers were the same ! said Duncan), and as the commander of a hard-fighting division he was supremely suited. But when handed his orders for the attack he hesitated for the first time in his career. For it was obvious that his rôle might rise above that of executive officer into the place of strategy. For this he asked my help. Let me say what the Division ought to do, and he would see that it was done. It was an admirable arrangement.

With the dawn the attack opened, though we were not immediately concerned. Along the twenty miles from Valenciennes to Tournai, Feather struck a hammer-blow. It was not expected that the overwhelming success of May 1st would be repeated : until the bridge-heads were consolidated the tanks could be of little service. But the goal was well worth an effort, for before us lay the railway centres of Mons and Mauberge.

Through the day the battle raged along that stricken frontier land. We had adopted something of the German methods, and where necessary we attacked in great numbers. Before a determined infantry and an overwhelming weight of artillery any line must eventually bend.

"The best part of this war, in one way, is that we are fighting Germans," Duncan said to me. "Thus, the problem of reading the enemy commander's mind is much simpler, because it is so methodical. When his trench line is broken, all he thinks about is the preparation of another one—if possible, a stronger one. Yet it is obvious if one trench line breaks any other is liable to. And one can read a lot, too, in his adoration of ground. As if a few miles mattered! As it is, we shall smash him. But supposing he had replaced his trench lines with a belt of machine-gun posts twenty miles deep! That would have presented a task which would have occupied twenty times as long.

"Yes, the German psychology is useful to me. I know, of course, that Heidelburg will not take really great risks. I will. As you know, the southern thirty miles of the British line is held by skeleton forces only. We shall attack elsewhere. Suppose, instead of merely resisting the attack, he were to fling all his force south? Our line would crumple up in an hour. But I know he won't do that, because he can't see further ahead than that hour.

So we shall succeed. It will be costly, but it is the end. On the eve of the attack I shall issue a special order to the troops, and ask for one final gigantic effort. They know me by now—and I shall get it."

He did. The prodigies of desperate valour performed on that day will never be surpassed. By mid-day we had advanced an average depth of five miles ; the bridges were repaired and tanks passed over in quantities. Every yard had been fiercely contested : the enemy knew as well as we did that it was life or death.

From the south came a continuous crescendo of drum-fire. From Switzerland almost to the sea the gunners were having their day. " Let Jerry have the ammunition before the war's over, or else we shall have to carry it all back," I heard a grinning bombardier yell. Success is intoxicating.

About seven in the evening I had a message from Duncan ; except for one or two bad patches, which were being straightened out, we were doing well. By no means all our reserves had yet entered the action, and he would make a bold bid for Mons on the morrow. At the same time, the frontage of the attack would be greatly extended. So the Iron Division might enter upon its task forthwith.

The longest day of the year—it seemed as if darkness would never come. Eleven o'clock had passed before Fermery gave his order. For the

first part of the Division's task was one in which it excelled—an operation by night.

A keen eye might have seen wriggling forms in No-Man's-Land. A keen ear might have heard strange sounds from the other side. Any man would have noticed that the star-shells suddenly ceased to rise and fall. And then twelve thousand men—the pride of British arms—rose and marched into the unknown.

It was Thiaucourt all over again. But the pace was quicker. Our men were even more determined, the resistance encountered was less keen. Within an hour we were in open country, leaving the trench area to be mopped up by Belgian battalions. Before us scouts moved rapidly : behind us were to follow Belgian divisions with much to gain : and in the far rear I could again catch a mental glimpse of horses impatiently pawing the ground.

So far as Fermery and I were concerned, it was like a pleasant after-dinner stroll. All the real work of the moment was being done by others. The Division was spread fan-wise over five miles of ground. We were the handle of the fan.

The fight in the trench lines was short : a dispirited enemy is no man to face a night attack. We marched on along the railway at a solid four miles an hour. By two o'clock we had surrounded Alost. Here a German division was captured complete while asleep. This and the defence of

Alost were handed over to one of the Belgian battalions which followed on our heels.[1]

I had often pictured the entry of the Allies into Brussels—the cheering population, the King of the Belgians, the Burgomaster, Allied troops in procession, maybe a few Germans led along by halters. Fiction may be more picturesque than fact, but it is not more dramatic. I wonder what those early rising Bruxellois thought as they saw khaki figures moving along their stone-paved streets. And I wonder what were the thoughts of the sinister Baron von Tissing when he awoke to find a grinning British soldier by his bedside.

As at Lille, I got the Burgomaster to take drastic action, lest the population should embarrass us. All the main streets were kept absolutely clear. Did we want anything done, we had thousands of volunteers at hand. But a battle around Brussels was no part of our plan.

We halted but to replenish and to await the arrival of the Belgian forces following on our heels, and to collect a medley of lorries and cars, so that a proportion of our men could rest as we marched. Then, leaving the Belgians and an administrative staff behind, we set off again. We had, of course, completely passed all German

[1] Actually, during the following day, the German Divisional Commander attempted a mass effort to escape, with the result that a large proportion of his men were shot down. The Belgians were severely criticised in the Central European Press at the time, but their action was perfectly justifiable.

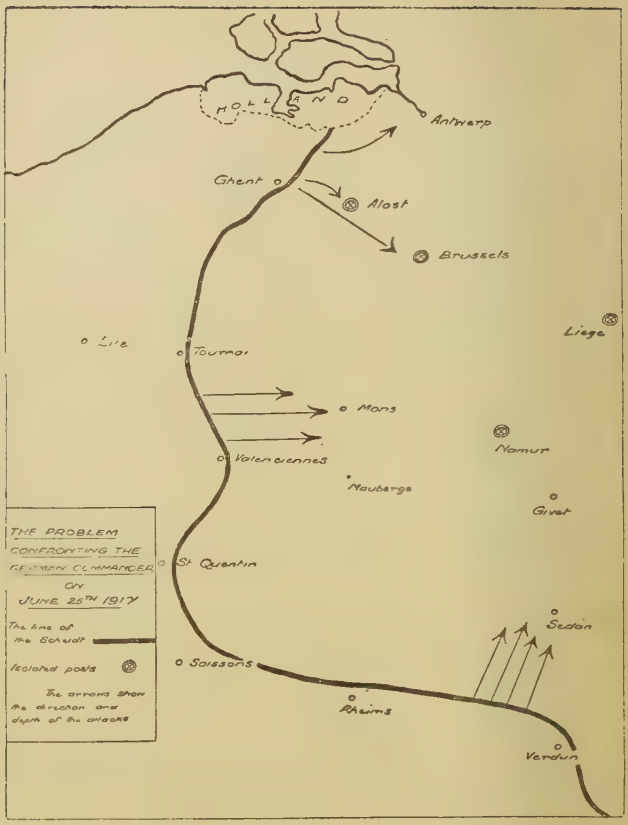
defence lines. We might safely move by day, since only casual detachments lay before us. And the Iron Division was not afraid of casual detachments.

It was at a historic spot where I had to make my first decision, for the cross-roads at Wavre saw a bitter prelude to Waterloo. In the cobbled square of the village we waited : I was thinking hard, while Fermery took stock. His task was easy, for he found we had suffered no more than 2,000 casualties : 10,000 men left—enough to conquer the world !

I waited : I was desperately anxious : I might miss the moment. I would give another half-hour only. Listen ! No. Another five minutes. Can you hear anything ? It will be too late—we shall have to move on. What's that—listen—fling yourself down to the ground ! You can't mistake that metallic clatter. The cavalry are here !

Here they come ! Look, that's a trot that eats up miles ! Who says the cavalry are out of date ? Your tanks can cross trenches, but they are only good for a few miles : your armoured cars can cover ground, but you've got to get them over the trenches first. The cavalry are still the only people who can do both. Here they come ! Halt in the Square, boys—I want to see your Commander.

Here's Farquaharson. What news ? What ?


HOLLAND
Antwerp
Ghent
Alost
Brussels
Liege
Lille
Tournai
Mons
Namur
Valenciennes
Maubeuge
Givet
St Quentin
Sedan
Soissons
Rheims
Verdun
THE PROBLEM CONFRONTING THE GERMAN COMMANDER ON JUNE 25TH 1917
The line of the Scheldt
Isolated posts
The arrows show the direction and depth of the attacks

Only a few hundred casualties in the two divisions? Great! And the horses? H'm. But I'm going to decide on the big thing, Farquaharson. You agree? Good! Never mind if you kill every horse you've got, so long as you get there. Goodbye, and all the best. One division by the direct road, one by the south through Huy. One brigade to cover the flanks of the Iron Division. Order your division on, Fermery.

I would not have cared to have been the German Commander that morning. Far away to the south, Petard delivered a mighty blow in the Argonne forest. There was a significance in its direction—northwards. On our own front Feather threw fifteen fresh divisions into the fight (where did they come from, thought Heidelburg: he did not know about the quarter-empty trenches around St. Quentin); by now his leading troops were within sight of Mons. In the far north, exploiting the gap which had been made in the night, three further divisions were marching on Brussels, and two more were wheeling east towards Antwerp. And in the very heart of the enemy country the Iron Division was marching on Namur, while two cavalry divisions were galloping towards Liège. And Liège is but thirty miles from the German frontier.

Through the heat of the day ten thousand men marched in tropical kit at a pace that never slackened. Straight as a proverbial crow's flight

swept the road, broad and solid. Eight abreast these men marched, their flanks, front, and rear well guarded by patrols borrowed from the cavalry divisions. It was eight o'clock when we reached Gembloux, where we halted awhile to round up a German labour detachment and to make the important railway junction temporarily unserviceable. Nineteen kilometres to Namur. Could the men do it? I looked at Fermery, and he laughed in my face. After all, they had marched but a mere forty-five miles in the last twenty-one hours.

Among the men immediately surrounding me, I regret to say that I alone was showing any signs of distress. For, it must be remembered, I had been leading a staff life for some months, and merely keeping fit was quite useless if I required to keep in step with the men of this iron-hard division. Yet my fellows realised my difficulty without a mention or a comment. Under no circumstances, of course, would I give in : nor did I wish to retire to the following lorries : fortunately, a commandeered horse solved the difficulty.

The red sun had long vanished from the sky as we went down the hillside towards Namur. There had been a brief halt before we spread ourselves out in battle shape. We had been told that there was a German division in Namur. Here was our chance to prove our worth of

Duncan's standard. ("I want men who can march twenty miles and then fight at the end of it.") But we had marched nearly sixty miles.

Were we expected? Probably so, but perhaps not. A semi-circular deployment, Fermery decided upon. Then let every man snatch an hour or two's rest. We would attack as usual, just before dawn.

The sounds of rifle-fire ahead sent every man sprinting forward. The German Commander had received too scanty warning of our approach. His troops—second-class Landwehr—were bewildered. It was a massacre, then a surrender. These were no men to oppose the Iron Division. By the time the first sunray managed to illuminate the historic citadel, a girdle had been drawn around the city. Then one man watched while two slept. The complete surrender of Namur followed without further fighting (there were few Germans left to fight!), and in the citadel Fermery and I occupied the German Commander's quarters and ate the lunch which had been prepared for him. Even more important, on the German wireless telegraphy apparatus I established contact with Duncan.

Will the world ever forget those next few days? I doubt it. How the French surged northwards from Verdun, reaching Sedan on the fourth day. How the British swept through Mons, and

how ten divisions—five of shock troops, five of colonials—leapfrogged the rest and marched in open order across open country. How the little Belgian Army made the most of the gap in its tiny corner, and entered Brussels and Antwerp amid unforgettable scenes. And how Liège and Namur stood sieges for the second time during the war.

At the first sign of attack Fermery flung his outposts out wide. He had no wish to invite the city to destruction ; yet the way must be barred. Already, to the south, the German Army was struggling home by the rough and hilly tracks of the Ardennes. We held the key to the only main line of retreat.

The attack was desperate. At first it came from two sides : then from four. The best troops that remained to the German Army dashed themselves against us. Our second brigade had the pleasure of meeting the Prussian Guard Division, an experience we had often sought. Yet, if the Germans were desperate, so were we. It was all a matter of days, even of hours. We knew of those ten divisions marching eastwards. We knew of the great semi-circle of armoured cars and cavalry that had passed through Brussels. So we fought on.

I say " we." For very soon every one of the Divisional Staff was involved. Our casualties were necessarily heavy. Within an hour of the

first attack I was sent out hurriedly to the command of the 2nd Brigade—Maplethorpe was dead. Yet command meant little. My men were scattered in posts over an absurdly large area. My job was to reinforce where necessary. Not that our posts were ever driven in—but they were often annihilated. We had adopted Duncan's method—no line of trenches, but a belt of posts—it paid.

Through the day and through the night we hung on, thinking of those ten divisions. Through another day and another night : were they still marching eastwards ? Let them hasten, for our ranks were thinning. Where were my three thousand of two days ago ? Could I have counted a thousand I would have been happy.

A message from Duncan. " We are almost within reach. You must hold out for another twelve hours. Hold Namur till we arrive, and the war is over ! " Can it be done ? What man here has slept for days ? Are they really of iron ?

An attack at dawn, of course. What's this ? No, not in strength—they are feeling us. This looks like a bigger thing. There is no need to give an order—every man knows what he has to do. At mid-day an attack in force. We must be outnumbered by ten to one. It is beaten off, but at what cost ! A message of despair to Fermery—he knows I would not send it unless

the position were desperate. Yet ours is the exposed position—if he can spare men from the others ! He does : four hundred of them. Three hundred Belgian volunteers to follow, as soon as they are armed and uniformed.

The heat of the day is past. Is another attack to come ? Yes. A mile to the west I hear the crack of rifle-fire. Silence. More musketry. What is happening ? Look ! Across the ridge they come—a grey mass of men, stumbling over the dead bodies of their comrades. Then a great chatter from rifles and machine-guns (we had borrowed a large number from the German stores at Namur). The wave falters, but moves on. Here a stream of bullets finds its mark and a swathe of men falls. But others follow. There is only one thing to do—even for a commander. I take a rifle and lie down. Thank goodness I haven't forgotten how to shoot. This is murder—murder. Yet they will win—there are too many of them. Keep on firing. Remember Duncan. "Nothing is so disconcerting to an attack as well-directed rifle-fire." So keep on. But they're here. Now the bayonet ! Thrust ! Thrust ! They waver ! Thrust home ! I scream in my excitement. Now—now ! Yes, they are running ! Alas for them—it is as dangerous to retreat as to advance. Another blaze of murder. We have won through. Yet only just. Another such torrent and we must be submerged. What an hour of

hell. I fling myself exhausted to the ground : I had not realised that I was bleeding from three wounds.

Yet soon I heard a sound which refreshed me in an instant. There is one note throughout the world which can never be mistaken—the swirl of the bagpipe. Often have I joked about it—never again. Over the ghastly fields strode the men of the Highland Division—the first of the ten. We rose and cheered, yet I almost wept to see my depleted ranks. Of the next week I can speak with no authority, since I spent it in a delirium. Worn out by the superhuman exertions of the action, bleeding profusely from my wounds, I was carried back to Namur. I missed the glorious sights that followed. The great mopping-up of the German armies, hopelessly cut off from their bases : the cavalry action in the Ardennes, where the enemy struggled to escape in hopeless confusion ; the great day when British and French troops met near Givet, enclosing half a million Germans within an inexorable circle of steel. I was almost normal again when I heard that the Germans were suing for an armistice. I was able to chuckle as I heard of the terms Duncan had imposed. A delay of twenty-four hours to get the terms signed—and by that time the first British troops were on German soil ! And the signing of the terms which meant unconditional surrender.

That night Duncan visited me in hospital.

"Our part is over, boy," he said. "The politicians have taken their cue. The war is over. And now the fun begins."

THE END